
A TAKES (Theology, Anthropology, Knowledge, Ethics and Salvation) analysis of the world view of the South African Communist Part

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Abstract

Formed in 1921, the SACP has had an influence on South African politics totally disproportionate to their size. This was attained through its close alliance with the ANC in line with the commands given by Vladimir Lenin at the Third Communist International that communist parties must align with nationalist parties to achieve a two-stage revolution. The SACP used its influence on the ANC to guide it in a communist direction, and through its influence led South Africa in the same direction. For this reason, it is crucial to understand their worldview since this is the guiding force behind the National Democratic Revolution. James Anderson developed a tool for worldview analysis named TAKES (Theology, Anthropology, Knowledge, Ethics, Salvation). Understanding the SACP's views on each of these, as well as the ideological groundwork laid by Marx and Lenin for each, will allow for a better understanding of the party, the ANC, and communism in general. This will lay the groundwork for a holistic Christian response to it.

Opsomming

Sedert stigting in 1921 het die SAKP 'n disproporsionele invloed op Suid-Afrikaanse politiek uitgeoefen vir 'n party van hulle grootte. Dit is as gevolg van hulle nabye bondgenootskap met die ANC. Hulle het hierdie bondgenootskap nagejaag op grond van 'n bevel deur Vladimir Lenin tydens die Derde Kommunistiese Internasionaal, wat beveel het dat kommunistiese partye hulle met nasionalistiese partye moet saambind om 'n twee-fase revolusie na te jaag. Die SAKP het hulle invloed op die ANC gebruik om die party in 'n kommunistiese rigting te stuur, en deur die ANC dieselfde met Suid-Afrika as geheel te doen. Om hierdie rede is dit belangrik om hulle wêreldbeskouing te verstaan, aangesien dit die dryfkrag agter die Nasionale Demokratiese Revolusie is. James Anderson het 'n metode vir die analise van wêreldbeskouings ontwerp, genaamd die TAKES-metode – dit staan in Engels vir Theology, Anthropology, Knowledge, Ethics, Salvation (Teologie, Antropologie, Kennis, Etiek en Verlossingsleer). Die verstaan van die SAKP se siening in elk van hierdie elemente, asook die ideologiese grondwerk wat vir elk deur Marx en Lenin neergelê is, sal daartoe lei dat die party, die ANC, en kommunisme oor die algemeen beter verstaan word. Dit sal die grondslag lê vir 'n holistiese Christelike antwoord daarop.

Key terms:

SACP, Worldview, Apologetics, Communism, Socialism

Sleutelterme:

SAKP, Wêreldbeskouing, Apologetiek, Kommunisme, Sosialisme

Introduction

The following article is the first of two that aims to interrogate the worldview of the South African Communist Party (SACP) according to a presuppositional approach. The method that will be used is the TAKES worldview analysis designed by James N. Anderson (2018) which looks at five aspects of a worldview: Theology, Anthropology, Knowledge (Epistemology), Ethics and Salvation.

To understand the historical development of the SACP's worldview, the views of Marx and Lenin will be shown first, and then how the SACP built on these. The SACP is a very orthodox party, as will be explained, that did not stray far from Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy.

The second article will be a critique of the SACP's worldview following the same TAKES method.

Before applying TAKES to the SACP, a brief definition of each of the five terms used in the method will be useful.

Theology – The word itself is derived from Greek and means “account of, or discourse about gods or God” (Wright, 1988:608). All theories have religious beliefs behind them (Clouser, 2005:2). Even a worldview that denies the existence of a god will have something that it identifies as the ultimate reality, which can in effect, be its “god” (Anderson, 2018). When this study looks at a worldview's theology, it will study what it has to say concerning ultimate reality. Another aspect of theology will look at the ideology's view of religion, even though it may deny there is a personal god or gods, it may still have something to say on this matter (Anderson, 2018).

Anthropology – The study of the nature of man. This include how man was created, what the purpose of his existence is, what his worth is, the nature of the soul and body, relationships, genders, and the relationship between man and God (Colwell, 1988:28).

Knowledge/Epistemology – The study of the theory of knowledge, of how we know what we know (Geisler, 1999:215). But more than merely studying knowledge this term also entails the study of “closely related subjects such as truth, logic, reason, experience, intuition, and revelation” (Anderson, 2018).

Ethics – Ethics has to do with human conduct (Field, 1988:232). It is the application of a law, which may differ from person to person and worldview to worldview, in any given situation (Frame, 1987:74). It also includes what this law is based on. Ultimately, it is how a person decides what is right and wrong conduct in different contexts, and the foundation of that decision.

Salvation – In Christian theology, this refers to how people are saved from sin and its consequences (Marshall, 1988:610). In the context of worldview analysis, salvation entails all that a worldview “says or implies about the basic human problem and the solution to that problem” (Anderson, 2018).

1. Theology

Marx and Lenin

Any study of a Marxist-Leninist view of theology and religion is bound to contain Marx's famous dictum: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (Marx, 1843).

Marx himself was an avowed atheist (Fetscher, 1991b:311), though he was born into an ethnic Jewish family. He saw any religious belief as an illusion; something that oppressed people cling to in order to assuage the pain they feel in the face of the material suffering they face. For Marx, this made religion a problem. If religion numbed the pain people felt because of unequal social and economic relationships, people would be more hesitant to fight against these. For Marx "it meant nothing more than cowardly submission, when what the working class needed was courage and self-respect" (Kiernan, 1991a:70).

When it comes to Clouser's (2005:23) definition of religious belief, namely a belief in something that has its own "unconditionally non-dependent reality", Marx was a materialist. Roy Bhaskar (1991:325) gives a helpful Marxist definition of materialism:

In its broadest sense, materialism contends that whatever exists just is, or at least depends upon, matter. (In its more general form it claims that all reality is essentially material; in its more specific form, that human reality is).

David McLellan (1993:361) adds an important clarification to this definition:

The materialism [in most forms of Marxism] consists not in any metaphysical doctrine about the world's consisting only of matter, but in the idea that to understand human beings and their history it is essential to begin with their material conditions of production. This is not to deny the validity of philosophical, political, artistic, or even at the limit, religious activities, but only to insist that these activities are moulded by, and only intelligible in terms of, the prevailing forms of material production

Putting these two descriptions together, one can see what the ultimate reality is for Marx: It is material and matter, specifically, material production. For Marx, nothing is more foundational to reality than economic activity as seen in material production.

Lenin has much the same view of religion as Marx. He also felt that once the economy was made less unequal and people became more educated, religious faith would disappear of its own accord (Pipes, 1997:339). But,

unlike Marx, Lenin had to implement his theoretical views in a practical way. Marx never had control of a country, yet Lenin did.

Theoretically, Lenin agreed with Marx and Engels that it is not possible to “abolish religion by compulsion” (Kiernan, 1991b:414). And, during the early stages of the Russian Revolution, while the Communist Party did not yet have full control, he did not do much against the religious beliefs of the Russian people. But once the Civil War ended in 1922, “he launched what he hoped would be the decisive offensive against the church” (Pipes, 1997:339). Churches were plundered, clergy had their livelihoods taken away, many were imprisoned and killed. Religious education was outlawed, and atheism was actively propagated in all schools. All members of the Communist Party were forced to take part in “atheistic activities” and were banned from taking part in any religious ceremony (Pipes, 1997:339-340).

This aggressive anti-religious campaign is a logical outflow of Lenin’s interpretation of Marx. If religion is truly something that numbs the pain of oppression and stops the lower classes from fulfilling what is necessary to attain freedom, it is in their best interest to free them from this opiate. It may be true that religion will fall away with time, but while it is still active, it merely hinders the progress of the revolution and it would be best to eradicate it.

The SACP

Regarding its view on theology the SACP has moved away dramatically from the militant atheism espoused by Marx and Lenin. Their view on religion and belief in a god or higher power (of any sort) is much more pragmatic. In many ways they have a *laissez-faire* approach to any belief in a higher power that an individual or group may have (SACP, 1998). But ultimately, there is a contradiction between their worldview and their practice in this regard, as this study will show. Two statements make the party’s view on religion clear.

The first is found in a document titled *Our Communism* (1998):

The SACP is not defined by being either a Party of atheists or believers. This is a matter of principle, and not opportunism. Our class approach to reality (a bias towards the poor), our struggle for a society based on social need and not on private profit, our condemnation of selfishness, and personal greed, and our refusal to give way to demoralisation (in other words, our espousing of hope) are closer to the core values of all of the world’s major religions than the ethos of globalisation, imperialism and the Johannesburg Stock Market. Dogmatic errors from the side of Marxists, and the class abuse of institutionalised religion by many reactionary forces, have historically contributed to a dichotomy between socialists and believers that should never have happened.

The second is in a written submission regarding the editorial policies of the SABC:

the SACP reaffirms its support and respect for the freedom of religion of all South Africans. As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of SACP members are religious and many of our meetings open and close with religious prayers (SACP, 2003).

Together, these statements provide a clear picture of the party's views on this matter. However, a few things stand out that need to be addressed. Firstly, officially, the party is agnostic; secondly, the party sees its ethics and the work it does as almost identical to the major world religions; thirdly, it supports freedom of religion; and finally, it opens and closes its meetings with prayers.

The SACP's support for freedom of religion is a marked change from the active persecution of religion that was practised by Lenin. The question may then be asked, how can the party give intellectual justification for such a dramatic shift?

Joe Slovo attempted to explain this in a speech given in 1994. According to him, Christianity and socialism are almost one and the same. He quotes Trevor Huddleston: "To be a Christian is to be a socialist" (Slovo, 1994:45).

The areas where Christianity and socialism converges in Slovo's (1994:46-48) view are:

- 1) The values of community and co-operation as opposed to "an unbridled free market, the frenzy of the stock market or of privatisation and self-enrichment from the labour of others".
- 2) Human equality – the fact that all people are made in the image of God (even though one can debate whether there is a god or not, the idea remains revolutionary).
- 3) The value of "sharing, of redistribution, on the basis of need not the basis of individual wealth and power". In Slovo's view this is an expression of Marx's ideal of "from everyone according to their ability, to everyone according to their need".
- 4) Christianity and socialism both provide a "liberatory hope". Both provide a hope to people who are oppressed that there may still be a better future. This hope can then spur them on to take action in pursuit of that future.

If this is the case, religion is no longer the opiate of the masses – a way for the oppressed to be kept happy and content in their lowly position. Religion (and Christianity specifically) can be a force for revolutionary good. It can provide the impetus that many need to pursue the party's goals. This was in

fact the case with many revolutionaries. Slovo (1994:43) believed that many joined the SACP out of the same motives that they would have entered the ministry with. He cites Chris Hani as an example: “Hani, in the early part of this life, did aspire to priesthood, but what drove him then was precisely the same aspiration that drove him towards socialism.”

Slovo believes that problems and divisions between Christianity and socialism arose in the time after Marx. His followers failed:

to draw a distinction between the practice of institutionalised religion and the moral potential of Christian teachings, we saw religion as nothing more than an instrument of capitalism [...] The right not to believe was transformed into state policy leading to persecution and discrimination against believers (Slovo, 1994:49).

The militant atheism on the part of socialists is partly a result of a misunderstanding of religion and partly a result of the historical situation they found themselves in. The church as an institution was part of the system of oppression and enforced it (Slovo, 1994:49).

Here one can see how the SACP is able to support freedom of religion and have prayers at their meetings. The atheism and suppression of religion can almost be viewed as a misunderstanding. There is no need to persecute the church, in fact, it can be used as an ally in the road to revolution.

But, interestingly, as the church does this, it makes itself more and more irrelevant. Ultimately leading to its obsolescence. Thoko Mdlalose made this point in an article written in 1986. He uses Marx’s view of the religion as “the sigh of the oppressed creature” as a starting point. Religion only thrives because humankind is oppressed and suffering. He states that “the main objective base for religion to thrive is national and class oppression and conflict” (Mdlalose, 1986:19). Thus, as the oppressed class continues its struggle for liberation, aided by the church, religion becomes less and less relevant. Until, one day, there is no more need for religion of any kind (Mdlalose, 1986:26).

When all of this is taken together, one can see that the SACP’s view of religion, and Christianity specifically, is either logically inconsistent or completely cynical. If, as they claim, religion is there only as a moral force and a salve against the pain of oppression, why open meetings in prayer? Is it merely a formality? If God is not truly ultimate, but only a way to explain what humankind does not yet understand, why pray to him? If the only reality is the material world, why bother with prayers to a higher power?

2. Anthropology

2.1 *Marx and Lenin*

2.1.1 *Human Origin and Worth*

When one looks at the atheistic worldview of orthodox communism, one can deduce their view of the origins of humankind. Humans were not created by any supernatural being, they are merely a product of Darwinian evolution. Both Engels and Marx were explicit in their admiration of Darwin's theories. Marx even wanted to dedicate the first volume of his Magnum Opus, *Das Kapital* to Darwin (Mazrui, 1968:81).

As for the differentiating element between humans and animals, Marx and Engels wrote the following:

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life (Engels & Marx, 2000).

From this we can see that ultimately, what makes humans unique is material production, with consciousness relegated to a secondary place. This is a purely materialistic view of mankind.

Another aspect to anthropology in Marx's thought is that one's primary identity is rooted in one's economic grouping. This is most clearly found in the opening chapter of the Communist Manifesto:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations. The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more

splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat (Engels & Marx, 2000).

For Marx and Engels, religion, language, and national identity were all subservient to class identity. “Class is the primary category through which personal identity is defined” (Smith, 2010:557).

Another implication of this is that Marxist-Leninists have a binary view of humanity. One is either an oppressor or oppressed. Lenin (2005b) again stated this eloquently as follows:

The old society was based on the principle: rob or be robbed; work for others or make others work for you; be a slave-owner or a slave. Naturally, people brought up in such a society assimilate with their mother’s milk, one might say, the psychology, the habit, the concept which says: you are either a slave-owner or a slave, or else, a small owner, a petty employee, a petty official, or an intellectual – in short, a man who is concerned only with himself, and does not care a rap for anybody else.

What he means by “the old society” is pre-revolutionary Russia. But this principle can be applied to the rest of humankind as well. (The implications of this view will be explained further in the section on “Ethics” in this paper.)

2.1.2 National Identity

In the early 1920’s, as the Bolshevik control over Russia was being consolidated, Lenin was at the forefront of adding another layer of oppression to the communist worldview. For Marx and Engels, national identity was, much like religion, a tool that was used by the bourgeoisie to divide and oppress the working class. For the most part, they viewed (with a few minor exceptions¹), national identity with dismissiveness. According to them, “the working men have no country” (Smith, 2010:558; Engels & Marx, 2000).

Lenin, along with other Marxists, developed Marx’s ideas to fit his own unique context. Just as nationalism was used by the ruling classes as a tool for oppression, it can also be used by communists in the struggle for revolution. Consequently, he drew out the distinction between oppressed and oppressor to encompass entire nations. There were oppressor nations, like Great Britain and Russia who in turn oppressed other nations, such as Ireland and Poland. Lenin believed that in supporting national liberation movements in oppressed nations,

1 The major exception to this is mentioned by Smith (2010: 558), namely the Polish national movement in opposition to the Russian empire.

communists could gain allies in fighting against stronger imperialist states. These allies might even include bourgeois elements (Smith, 2010:558).

These ideas were brought to practical application during the Third Communist International in the early 1920s, in which Lenin showed great interest in the South African situation (Davidson & Filatova, 2013:81). Here he commanded Communist parties in colonised countries to ally themselves with national and anti-colonial movements. It was believed that this was the only way to achieve revolution, since communists made up only a small proportion of the population in these countries (Johnstone, 1991a:237). According to Lenin (2004):

a national movement is one which expresses the objective needs of the whole country and aims its heaviest blows at the central forces of the enemy opposing the country's development. A national movement is one which has the sympathy of the vast majority of the population.

Once national liberation was achieved, the communists could then proceed with their revolution.

It is in this milieu that not only the SACP's anthropology is shaped, but also its strategy and tactics, as this article will show.

2.1.3 Gender Identity

Another aspect of humanity in which one can see the Marxist anthropology is in its view of women. Most influential in this regard is Engels' work, *The Origin of the Family* (Barret, 1991:161). In his view, and in that of Lenin following him, "the home was just like a capitalist factory except that housewives were unwaged" (Himmelweit, 1991:135).

The implications of this view are stark. Having a child has no inherent value, for Marxists, motherhood is not a joy, it is an oppressive force. Raising a child is not an economic endeavour, the woman receives no pay and therefore, she is oppressed by it. Even if the husband does provide financially for the woman and her child, she is still oppressed because she does not generate that wealth herself.

2.2 The SACP

The SACP (then called the Communist Party of South Africa) was founded in 1921. Initially it was made up of white workers and intellectuals, though not segregated. Its goal was to represent and organise all workers in the country. Initially, most of its focus was on white workers, but after the Rand Revolt of

1922, the party decided to focus on organising a labour movement among the black workers (Lerumo, 2018; SACP, 1998).

When delegates of the party went to Moscow to attend the Communist International (Comintern), there were some disagreements. In these, one can see more clearly the view of human identity espoused by the SACP. The representative of the party, Sidney Bunting, pushed against the orders of the Comintern that the party must ally itself to a nationalist movement and support national liberation before they pursue a communist revolution. He agreed with the Comintern's ultimate goal for black Africans, namely "land for the Africans, equal rights and abolition of racial laws and land". However, he felt that a "class struggle is more capable of accomplishing the same tasks", not a nationalist struggle (Lerumo, 2018). Bunting's concerns were shot down and the party was ordered to join in an alliance with the ANC (SACP, 1998).

At the SACP's 10th Congress in 1998, the party described what happened during that time as follows:

In 1928/29, partly as the result of an internal debate, and principally as a result of a Communist International resolution, the CPSA² changed its strategic perspective to a national liberation struggle in alliance with the still relatively undeveloped ANC. The CPSA began to advance the slogan of majority rule, calling for a Black Republic. The struggle for socialism, the Party now began to argue, was a struggle that had to be waged in the broader context of a national liberation struggle against a form of colonial oppression [...] in time, the most common version of the relationship between the struggles was to be the "two-stage thesis" – first there would be a national democratic revolution, and a subsequent socialist stage would follow (SACP, 1998).

Here one can clearly see that race and nationalism were added to the list of oppressed and oppressor. A person's identity was no longer only focused on their class, but also their race. However, most important still was where they fell in with regard to oppressor or oppressed.

As time progressed, more forms of oppression were added. This addition of more forms of oppression can be seen in the way the party words its 13th Congress Political Programme. Where the Communist Manifesto said that "[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles", the SACP (2012b) says that "[t]he history of human societies has been one [...] many variants of brutal patriarchal, colonial, racial, class and other oppressions".

2 Initially, the party was named the Communist Party of South Africa, or CPSA.

The idea of human identity primarily based on a person's place in oppressive hierarchies is most clearly seen in the party's view of wives and mothers. The role of motherhood is referred to as "informal, unpaid reproductive labour" (SACP, 1998). A mother is oppressed because she is not paid to bear and raise children. Because there is no economic benefit to her in that relationship, it is oppressive. Jenny Schreiner (2017:88) quotes Lenin in this regard:

One of the conditions for the social emancipation of women, and consequently one of the principles for solving this question was, in Lenin's view, the wide use of female labour in social production. He said that "to effect her complete emancipation and make her the equal of the man, it is necessary for the national economy to be socialised and for women to participate in common productive labour. Then women will occupy the same position as men."

These varying forms of oppression cannot be isolated. This leads to the party criticising black economic empowerment (BEE) for merely dealing with race, and not keeping in mind the toll of class oppression and patriarchy (SACP, 2012b).

From the preceding exposition, a summary of the SACP anthropology can be made: Humans are the product of natural evolution, each individual is made up of a competing list of oppressions, the most important element of his or her identity is in which area he or she is most oppressed. The list of ways in which a person can be oppressed is not limited, but the party's current foci are race, class and gender.

For example, a black man may be oppressed because of his race, but if he is married and his wife raises the children, he is also her oppressor. If he is a heterosexual Christian man, he is also part of the group that oppresses homosexuals and minority religions.

3. Knowledge

In a study of this size, the subject of epistemology will be limited, but can be expanded on at a later stage. For the purpose of this study, the subject of ultimate authority in knowledge will be analysed.³ In this regard, the SACP builds on the work specifically of Lenin and his contribution to Marxism.

3 This means that a crucial area of epistemology in the Marxist-Leninist worldview, namely dialectical materialism, will not be studied.

3.1 *Marx and Lenin*

Marx hoped that a socialist society “might evolve peacefully in certain liberal societies” (Baradat, 2012:197). Lenin, however, was convinced that, specifically in Russia with its distinctive socio-economic and cultural character, a revolution will never occur on its own, and that it needed to be guided and will by necessity be violent (Baradat, 2012:197).

One of Lenin’s principal additions to Marxist thought, was the idea of a vanguard party. While Marx did mention such a party in his writings, its role was greatly diminished (Johnstone, 1991b:360; Baradat, 2012:198). Lenin’s most famous work is a 1902 book entitled, *What Is to Be Done?*. In this book, he argues that the working classes cannot develop a class-consciousness that can lead to revolution by itself, “it would have to be brought to them from without” (Lenin, 2005a). The working class need intellectuals to develop this consciousness, because only they “are well educated and informed and stand at a distance from the immediate production process” (Fetscher, 1991a:80). This allows them to see the truth of oppression more clearly than the workers. For this class-consciousness to move from the intellectuals to the oppressed, a vanguard party was needed, “the cadre party of professional revolutionaries” (Fetscher, 1991a:80).

Lenin (2005a) outlines the difference between the role of the party and that of the workers as follows:

Such workers, average people of the masses, are capable of displaying enormous energy and self-sacrifice in strikes and in street, battles with the police and the troops, and are capable (in fact, are alone capable) of determining the outcome of our entire movement – but the struggle against the political police requires special qualities; it requires professional revolutionaries. And we must see to it, not only that the masses “advance” concrete demands, but that the masses of the workers “advance” an increasing number of such professional revolutionaries.

From this, one can see the role of the party in epistemology. The party and the professional revolutionaries within it, know the truth better than the worker, and because of this, the party is able to say what is true and what is false. The party knows the lot of the worker better than the worker himself does. Because the party represents the workers, any disagreement with the party is disagreement with the workers as a whole.

3.2 *The SACP*

As one analyses the epistemology of the SACP, it will be seen that there has been very little change from what was taught by Marx and Lenin. The party proudly bases its understanding of the world on what has been taught by them. It has been shown before that the SACP has been known as the most orthodox Marxist-Leninist communist party in the world (Scholtz & Scholtz, 2008b:123). This has been a role that the party embraces. As will be shown, the fundamental basis of all knowledge is Marxist-Leninism as espoused by the party. In its constitution, the SACP (2012a) states the following: “In leading the working class towards national and social emancipation, the SACP is guided by those principles of Marxism-Leninism whose universal validity has been proven by historical experience.” The ideology is paramount, which is the basis of all official actions.

The pre-eminence of ideology can be seen in the pledge that all members of the party must take:

I accept the aims and objectives of the SACP and agree to abide by its Constitution and loyally to carry out the decisions of the Party. I shall strive to live up to the ideals of Communism and shall selflessly serve the workers and the poor and the country, always placing the interests of the Party and the workers and the poor above personal interests (SACP, 2012a).

From this one can deduce a number of foundations of epistemology for the SACP. Firstly, the party is the supreme authority, which is in line with Lenin’s teaching of a vanguard party. Marxist-Leninism is important, but more important is the way in which the party contextualises Marxist-Leninism to the South African context.

The work of “selflessly [serving] the workers and the poor of the country” must also be done in accordance with ideological orthodoxy. The SACP believes that, because the dominant class has the power to communicate its ideas more easily, “the workers and the poor can (and actually have) supported ideas, including very reactionary and anti-working class ideas, that are not in accordance with their material reality” (SACP, 2007a). What this means is that the working class cannot always be trusted to act in its best interests. They need to be ideologically educated, and this is the work of the party.

When the party campaigns for early childhood education, the foundation of this charge is that the education presented should be ideologically in line with “working class ideals” (SACP, 2007b). And, as we have seen, the Party is best placed to understand what these ideals are, not the working class themselves. In another publication it states that “Education as an ideological

state apparatus and a site of ideological struggles” (SACP, 2007a). The reason for education is to instil ideological orthodoxy from a young age.

In its constitution the SACP gives a list of what is expected of its members. The first duties are as follows: “Study Marxism-Leninism and endeavour to raise his/her level of understanding” and “Read, engage with and popularise SACP publications” (SACP, 2012a). Again, we can see the pre-eminence of ideology. Every member must be a student of Marxist-Leninism as interpreted by the SACP as well as a proselytiser of its teachings.

4. Ethics

4.1 *Marx and Lenin*

As one comes to the Marxist view of ethics or morals one is immediately confronted with a contradiction. This is stipulated clearly by Steven Lukes (1991:341):

On the one hand, it is claimed that morality is a form of Ideology, that any given morality arises out of a particular stage of the development of productive forces and relations and is relative to a particular mode of production and particular class interests, that there are no eternal moral truths, that the very form of morality and general ideas such as freedom and justice cannot “completely vanish except with the total disappearance of class antagonisms” (Communist Manifesto), that Marxism is opposed to all moralizing and that the Marxist critique of both capitalism and political economy is not moral but scientific. On the other hand, Marxist writings are full of moral judgments, implicit and explicit.

In other words, Marxists reject morality as by definition it is based on the prevailing class conflict, but at the same time, they use a set of ethics to critique the prevailing class conflict. The aim of this section is not to solve this contradiction, but to rather delve deeper and see on what the Marxists base their belief that a certain action or system is moral or immoral.

Lenin is again very clear on this and he provides the foundation that the SACP builds on. The clearest expression of his view on ethics and morality can be found in a speech he gave in 1920 entitled, “The Tasks of the Youth Leagues.” In it, he explicitly rejects any ethic based on God’s commandments. He believes that this ethic was used by the clergy, landowners and bourgeoisie as a pretence to oppress workers and peasants.

We reject any morality based on extra-human and extra-class concepts. We say that this is deception, dupery, stultification of the workers and peasants in the interests of the landowners and capitalists (Lenin, 2005b).

This means that ethics cannot be based on any sort of supernatural revelation. For Lenin, there is no God and no revelation to base ethics on.

On what is ethics then based for Lenin? In the same speech, he elucidates it clearly:

We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle. Our morality stems from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat [...] to us there is no such thing as a morality that stands outside human society; that is a fraud. To us morality is subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle (Lenin, 2005b).

What this ultimately means is that the only way to determine whether an action is moral or not, is to measure it according to the needs of the class. As was seen in the section on epistemology, the arbiter of class interest is the party. Therefore, the party is the arbiter of morality. What the party says and does is moral by definition.

In an article written by the Polish scholar, Kazys Gecys (1955) he gives an example of what this looked like in the Soviet Union:

The needs of the class struggle of the proletariat determine morality; hence whatever fosters the revolutionary overthrow of "capitalism", and the violent dispossession of those who own property is, morally, a good act; whatever hinders the revolution, such as a refusal to take orders from the revolutionary leader, and the refusal to think in the way one is supposed to think, is, morally, a bad act. There is no limit to hatred, violence, social turmoil, chicanery duplicity, devilry, unscrupulousness, etc. On the contrary, such acts are presented as the principal Communist virtues.

Implied in all of this, as was seen in the section on anthropology, is that the individual is unimportant, and only the collective good (as determined by the party).

Another implication is that which is ethical, or not, will change depending on the stage of the revolution. More violence may be necessary while the revolution is being established and the old order dispossessed of its property and power. As things change, methods may become less oppressive (Gecys, 1955). Ultimately, for both Marx and Lenin, there was a belief that when all class contradictions have been abolished and forgotten, humankind will achieve "a really human morality". Much like religion, morality and ethics are formed by the social and economic circumstances that people find themselves in. Once these have been purged of all oppression, the "morality of emancipation" will be the guiding force for all people (Lukes, 1991:342; Gecys, 1955).

4.2 *The SACP*

The SACP takes this view and builds on it. In its own words, all ethics are connected to a “progressive, transformational agenda in which the values of solidarity are foremost” (SACP, 2012b). For them, the ultimate goal of the transformation of society in a classless communist society is the basis of their ethics. Therefore, when party members serve in government, they are expected “to conduct themselves as exemplary communists” (SACP, 2012b). This means that every decision made, or action taken should be taken with this ideology in mind.

What does this entail? The party claims that their values and morals are in line with most of the major religions in the world. This was seen in a previous section, but it is helpful to look at another quote from the party:

Our class approach to reality (a bias towards the poor), our struggle for a society based on social need and not on private profit, our condemnation of selfishness, and personal greed, and our refusal to give way to demoralisation (in other words, our espousing of hope) are closer to the core values of all of the world’s major religions than the ethos of globalisation, imperialism and the Johannesburg Stock Market (SACP, 1998).

But the ethics of the party can also be contrasted with the ethics of religion.

Christians see social life primarily in moral categories i.e. good and evil, love and hate, poor and rich, generosity and greed, etc. We don’t reject moral values, but we regard them as an unsound framework for scientific analysis and an unreliable guide to effective action for changing the world (Mdlalose, 1986:19).

What can be seen here is that ethics for the party primarily concerns interpersonal ethics. The only sins that matter are sins against other people. No mention is made of a sin that may be made against any sort of theistic higher power.

Ethics is also primarily class-based, as opposed to focus on the individual. An action can be judged ethically on whether it advances the cause of the oppressed class. This is seen in a recent paper by Jeremy Cronin on the issue of land redistribution, *Towards a Marxist approach to land*. In it he writes about those black South Africans who have been beneficiaries of land redistribution in the past. They were given the option of either getting ownership of the land or monetary compensation, the majority chose the monetary option. Cronin (2018:39) says of this:

This is perfectly legal and completely understandable. Many communities and families have now rebuilt their lives in other localities, often in more urban settings. There is also the appreciation that going back to farming on land

that has, perhaps, not been worked for many years is a daunting task without additional financial and other support. However, taking monetary compensation, while ensuring that some justice is done, means that restitution has not been a major path to the radical transformation of existing racialised patterns of land ownership and land use in both rural and urban South Africa.

What this means is that, while individuals, families and even whole communities are helped by getting financial compensation, it is not actually that desirable. What ultimately matters, is that the white domination in the area of landownership must be ended. It is the bigger picture that matters. The class struggle matters more than the welfare of communities, families and individuals. It seems as though the party would prefer people to endure more hardship if that would mean the racial and class imbalances are addressed.

One can draw a similar conclusion from the party's support for the Soviet Union before its dissolution. Scholtz and Scholtz (2008a:95-96) lists a number of morally reprehensible actions that the Soviet Union took that were either condoned or ignored by the SACP. Or else when they were condemned it came far too late. These include, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (a Soviet non-aggression treaty with the Nazis that included plans for invading and dividing up Poland), the Holodomor (a Soviet-manufactured famine in Ukraine that killed up to 12 million people); Stalin's Great Purge; the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary and 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Joe Slovo (1991:2) himself described the party's stance on international politics as "blind adherence to the Soviet Communist Party". Yusuf M. Dadoo, then chairman of the SACP, said in 1972 that "one's attitude to the Soviet Union is the principal criterion, the touchstone of the sincerity and honesty of every leader of the working-class movement and every democrat" (Scholtz & Scholtz, 2008a:95).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the party had to reckon with what was done under the banner of communism by that regime. Various paths were taken to justify, excuse or apologise for the SACP's consistent support of a regime that was regarded as oppressive, but which also ultimately failed to attain the full potential of a communist state.

In the 1998 document titled *Our Marxism*, the party looked back at these events in this way:

In the context of unceasing capitalist hostility and destabilisation efforts directed against the first workers' state by imperialist powers, the CPSA's basic position

was correct. Later, it was the Soviet Union and its bloc in the key decades of the 1960s and 70s, when our liberation movement had suffered a serious strategic defeat, that offered unquestioning support to our own struggle (SACP, 1998).

Officially, it stands by its support of the Soviet Union. The reason was that it was amidst a war with capitalist countries, and as the only communist state at that time, it had to be supported. The party balances its stance out as follows:

we need to note that our own fundamentally correct solidarity with the Soviet Union, often lacked serious balance or nuance. We failed to appreciate, until very late, the horrendous levels of criminal abuse that occurred during the Stalin years, and we failed to be critical of the bureaucratic distortions in the post-Stalin period. We also failed to appreciate, until very late in the day, the levels of internal crisis in the former Soviet Union and Soviet bloc (SACP, 1998).

It does acknowledge that it was wrong in its uncritical support. But, when it gives reasons for this being wrong, one can get a clear picture of the basis of their ethics. The party believes that because it did not condemn Soviet atrocities earlier, for much of the 1990s “the SACP has had to devote considerable energies and time to collectively debating and developing a consistent socialist understanding of these questions” (SACP, 1998). The major problem it sees is not moral, but ideological. No mention is made of human suffering, the real problem is the energies that had to be wasted in debating what happened in the past and having it fit in with a socialist understanding. This is confirmed by what the party sees as its role in the future: “The challenge to rescue socialism from the events of 1989-91 and to renew socialist confidence and optimism remains an important priority of the SACP” (SACP, 1998). Socialism is the thing that needs to be guarded and saved from what happened. Ultimately that is most important. Human suffering is not ignored, but the progress of socialism is more important.

Putting all of this together one can show clearly what the party’s ethics are, and how this is in fact unsound and dangerous. Ultimately, an individual, or family, or community’s welfare is not as important as the class struggle. This means that the SACP will support murderous regimes and violence if it is done in the name of furthering the road to socialism. All that matters is the class struggle. For this reason, individual actions to improve one’s lot in life or that of one’s community (for example taking money as compensation instead of land) are wrong.

5. Salvation

5.1 *Marx and Lenin*

The preceding section on Theology, Anthropology, Knowledge and Ethics in the worldview of the SACP allows for a clear picture as to their view on Salvation. This covers the aspect of the worldview in which the way of salvation for humankind is shown. How can humankind improve its situation? Is it even possible? What is the ultimate goal that is aimed at?

In an earlier draft of the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels (2000) asked and answered some of these questions. His answers provide a helpful summary.

What is the aim of the Communists? Answer: To organise society in such a way that every member of it can develop and use all his capabilities and powers in complete freedom and without thereby infringing the basic conditions of this society.

How do you wish to achieve this aim? Answer: By the elimination of private property and its replacement by community of property.

From this, one can see that for a Marxist the ultimate salvation for mankind is one in which every person can be totally free to pursue his own goals while at the same time not infringing on the rights of others. The only way for this to be achieved is with the elimination of all private property. Instead, property will be owned by the collective. This will be true communism, and true human freedom.

The means of attaining this goal is revolution. Each era in human civilisation was preceded by a revolution, which was “a cataclysmic leap from one of these [eras] to the next”. This history will continue until the ultimate and final communist revolution when all class differences would be set aside (Kiernan, 1991c:425).

Venter and Bain (2015) expand on this:

For Marxist scholars, revolution is a necessary predestined locomotive of history; it is the law of nature, and so indeed all history is the story of revolution. Revolution, thus, will of necessity occur; although as becomes clear from the works of Lenin and Mao, a revolutionary must strategize, keep secrets and operate undercover to promote certain desirable outcomes. The revolutionary process is not necessarily an open process; it must be a strategized one, reliant on move and countermove. Thus, the process of revolution is not necessarily a process that will be completed rapidly.

So, a communist revolution is the goal of all Marxists, but the road to revolution may differ between different schools of Marxism and change with changing circumstances.

From the outset, Marx and Engels believed that a revolution like this will only be possible when the proletariat develop their own class consciousness. They will see their true state of oppression and rise together against it. Marx believed that “the proletarian revolution would eventually erupt automatically” (Baradat, 2012:197).

As was shown earlier, Lenin built on Marx’s thought in this regard, while at the same time differing from him. He still believed that the proletariat were the key to a successful revolution, but they cannot be trusted to lead this themselves. They needed a vanguard party to lead them.

Another crucial aspect of Lenin’s contribution is his idea of a two-stage revolution (Bottomore, 1991:89). In the first phase, the “socialist” phase, the party (representing the proletariat) will seize power away from the bourgeoisie. In this phase, all institutions of power, including the state will be taken over by the dictatorship of the proletariat and be used for the betterment of the collective. As time progresses, the state will eventually wither away, it will no longer be needed, and a state of true communism will be arrived at. This will be a violent time, since those who are normally in power will not easily give up what they have (Lenin, 2005c; Sweezy, 1991:445; Miliband, 1991:467).

For both Marx and Lenin, there was a real hope that a utopia will be reached. They both believed that if the external economic forces that facilitated oppression were done away with, humans flourishing was a certainty. That is why Lenin could speak of the state withering away, coercive power will no longer be needed to maintain law, order and equality – people will do it out of their own freed natures.

5.2 *The SACP*

In accordance with general Marxist doctrine, the SACP’s view of the ultimate salvation of humankind has also developed with time.

As was seen earlier, the SACP was guided by the Leninist principle of a vanguard party. The party officially also agreed with Lenin that a socialist revolution will not necessarily take place naturally, it must be guided and planned for:⁴

4 Interestingly, although officially the party followed the Leninist belief of the necessity of a vanguard party, in other comments some of its leaders gave credence to Marx’s belief that a socialist society will eventually emerge even without a vanguard leading it. Joe Slovo, the party’s general secretary from 1984 to 1991 said:
We have a vision of society whose time will undoubtedly come; a socialist society in which one person does not live off the labour of another. And that time will come not because our Party exists but because our working people – the most wretched of our society – will in the

The struggle for socialism is a vast, historical struggle to shift the balance of class forces towards working people and other popular forces. This struggle has not been, and will not be, a simple evolutionary development, guaranteed by history. Taking place on the terrain of a world dominated by capitalism, it is marked by unevenness, by moments of stagnation, by advances, ruptures, by reverses, and, no doubt, by decisive moments (SACP, 1998).

The party's first role was to influence the ANC and direct it towards a more communist worldview. This was achieved through various means, but primarily through a system of dual membership. Many of the leading members of the ANC were also SACP members, and this meant that the ANC morphed from a relatively conservative nationalist party into a party embracing socialism. In this regard, the SACP was successful in implementing Lenin's plans (Lerumo, 2018).

With the success of the nationalist revolution at the end of apartheid, the party then moved on to the second stage. This is called the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), and is still theoretically the guiding ideological principle of both the SACP and ANC.

The NDR is the transitional stage between the national revolution and the ultimate goal of a socialist revolution. The party still believes in the ultimate withering away of the state (Nzimande, 2006), but in this transitional phase, they believe that the state's power must be used to further the progress towards communism.

In "The South African Road to Socialism: 13th Congress Political Programme of the SACP 2012 – 2017" and "Political Report of the SACP's 11th Congress Central Committee as tabled before the 12th Congress" the party lays out clearly what this will mean in practice:

It is a transitional economy in which capitalism is still present, but in which the socialised sector is hegemonic. A socialised sector will include democratic state-owned entities, but also other forms of public property, and a vibrant cooperative sector. Socialism will progressively roll back the capitalist market, decommodifying basic human needs. A socialism of the 21st century will also place a premium on ensuring sustainable livelihoods and communities for its people and the sustainable use of natural resources. Socialism is not some 'second' stage after the completion of the NDR. As far as the SACP is concerned, advancing, deepening and defending the NDR will require an increasingly decisive advance towards socialism. Which is why we say: "Socialism is the future, build it now" (SACP, 2012b)!

end ensure the creation of both a political and economic democracy in our country. That is the essence of what we stand for (Slovo, 1991).

The SACP is a vanguard party of socialism, and not a narrowly electoralist formation; Our approach to elections will be guided in this phase of the struggle by our overall strategic commitment to advancing, deepening and defending the national democratic revolution – the South African road to socialism; and Our strategic objective in regard to state power is to secure not party political but working class hegemony over the state (SACP, 2012b).

To be all of this, the NDR has to be a revolutionary struggle to transform the underlying, systemic features of our society that continue to reproduce race, gendered and class oppression. Which is to say: The NDR in our present conjuncture has, in essence, to be a struggle to transform the dependent-development accumulation path of our economy, and the chronic underdevelopment that this accumulation path still daily reproduces (SACP, 2012b).

Only working class hegemony and activism on the ground and in the state will ensure that the developmental state fulfils its developmental role ...To do the above we need a bold state, underpinned by united working class activism and power that unapologetically takes its rightful leadership responsibility to drive the developmental transformation for both the public and private workplaces (SACP, 2012b)!

[I]t is important for us as communists, in the midst of the struggles to deepen, consolidate and advance the national democratic revolution, that we never for once lose sight of our goal to achieve a socialist South Africa (SACP, 2007a).

From these preceding quotes, the SACP's view of what salvation will look like and who will be the saviour becomes clear. For them, the ultimate goal, the ultimate end, is a communist society. They agree with Marx and those who follow him that if the material means of oppression are removed, human thriving is guaranteed.

As for who the saviour is, it is the vanguard party. Fully consistent with Lenin's views, the party is the guiding force behind the salvation of humankind, it must lead the workers toward their own salvation. What the party needs, however, is power, and it has this in the form of the state. Although the state will not always exist, while it is in power, the party must use it to advance its ideology and ideological programs. The state will be used to better the lives of the poor; at the same time it must be used to lessen the power of the old ruling class. While working within the state, all communists must keep the goal of a socialist South Africa in mind they must not get bogged down in the present, they must always look to the ultimate goal.

When all these steps are followed, salvation is assured.

Conclusion

From the preceding, a short summary of the worldview of the SACP using the TAKES method can be seen as follows:

The SACP sees economic and material forces as the ultimate basis for reality; mankind is divided into separate group identities, that of oppressor and oppressed, the oppressed cannot be trusted to work for their own good, the vanguard party must do this; Marxist-Leninism, as interpreted by the SACP is the ground for true knowledge; the needs of the collective, as determined by the party is also the grounds for ethics; true salvation will only be found once the party completes its revolutionary goals, then all oppression will be ended.

What this shows is that in trying to build a worldview based on that of the SACP, a person will be forced to put unparalleled trust in the party and its ideology. The basis of knowledge, grounds of ethics and hope of salvation are all found only within its ideology.

Using this breakdown of the worldview of the SACP allows a Christian apologist to critique each aspect in turn, which will be done in another article.

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