

Is there a new Soviet approach to South Africa?

Putting the Starushenko/Goncharov controversy into perspective

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Recent statements about South Africa by leading Soviet academics have caused quite a stir in South Africa and in the Western press. In December 1986, the London-based bulletin *Africa Analysis* published a short piece by a Western scholar who had just come back from intensive talks with Soviet Africanists and diplomats in Moscow.¹ In it he argued that Soviet thinking on developments in Southern Africa might be quite different from what it is still believed to be in South Africa and in the West. He was specifically struck by two sets of observations:

- quite a number of Soviet experts seemed to be worried rather than enthusiastic about the escalation of violence in the South African townships in the mid-1980s;
- the more realistic Soviet Africanists and experts on developing countries seemed to have lost faith in the idea that Africa will ever advance to socialism; with regard to post-apartheid South Africa, they asserted that objective factors would compel it to maintain its close economic co-operation with the Western industrialized countries; "There are objective factors which cannot be manipulated by ideology" is a sentence often heard from economists.

A statement by a deputy-director of the Africa Institute of the Soviet Aca-

demy of Science gives credence to this remarkable change in Soviet thinking on Southern Africa. At the second Soviet-African Conference "for Peace, Cooperation and Social Progress" in June 1986, Gleb Starushenko told the audience that in South Africa the "anti-racist forces do not put forward plans for a broad nationalization of capitalist property as indispensable and they are ready to give the bourgeoisie the relevant guarantee". He also encouraged the ANC to "work out comprehensive guarantees for the white population which could be implemented after the elimination of the regime of apartheid".²

For those familiar with constitutional thinking in South Africa, Starushenko's statement was redolent of Progressive Federal Party (PFP) policy. His ideas about safeguarding white minority rights have much in common with the PFP's thinking and with the KwaZulu/Natal Indaba constitutional proposal of 1986/87. The assessment in *Africa Analysis* ended by cautioning that Starushenko's speech should not be taken as official Soviet policy, nevertheless his statements were more than a reflection of his personal views.

This interpretation did not remain unchallenged: it upset parts of the South African Communist Party (SACP). In the official organ of the party, *The African Communist*, the article in *Africa Analysis* was dismissed as a tendentious

piece, full of assertions, but short of evidence.³ At no time, the authors asserted, had Soviet political figures, party functionaries or academics, ever expressed "the kind of scepticism reported in *Africa Analysis*" either "to those in the movement or in their research and published works". With respect to Starushenko's statement, they pointed out that "his view does not represent or claim to represent the views of the CPSU or of the Soviet Government" (which in fact *Africa Analysis* did not claim) and added that the ANC delegation and many Soviet scientists took issue with Starushenko in a comradely manner.

In June 1987 another deputy-director of Moscow's Africa Institute, Victor Goncharov, entered the debate. In Harare he took part in a conference on Southern African regional security, jointly hosted by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies and the University of Zimbabwe. In an interview with the South African journal *Work in Progress*, he explicitly distanced himself from Starushenko's remarks on white minority rights. He made it clear that Starushenko was, in fact, putting forward only his personal views and that these reflected neither the views of the Institute nor those of the Soviet government.⁴

The sharp reaction in *The South*

African Communist and the divergent statements of Starushenko and Goncharov created some confusion among Western journalists, and particularly in South Africa, as to whether there is a significant change in Soviet policy towards South Africa. Dr Philip Nel, the director of the Institute for Soviet Studies at Stellenbosch University, not only perceived a rift between Starushenko and Goncharov, but also between Starushenko and a younger member of the Africa Institute, Vladimir Tikhomirov.⁵ Tikhomirov had just published the first thorough Soviet study on white politics in South Africa, entitled "The party of apartheid — The socio-political evolution of South Africa's National Party" (in Russian). In an interview for the Johannesburg newspaper *The Star*, Nel stated that this book directly contradicted Starushenko's message. In fact, he was struck by the fairly rigid and dogmatic, although well documented, Leninist approach in Tikhomirov's book.

Nel's interview in *The Star* also showed how formidable is the task of interpreting Soviet politics in a period of change. Late in the summer of 1987 he had visited Moscow in an attempt to discover what was happening, especially concerning Soviet policy in Southern Africa. He was able to speak with a number of Soviet Africanists and with decision-makers in bodies like the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

He found that there was no fundamental contradiction between the thinking of Tikhomirov and Starushenko. On the contrary, since Tikhomirov had acquired a comprehensive understanding of white politics through the research for his book, he had been heavily involved in drafting Starushenko's speech, including the parts on white minority rights. Since the publication of the article in *Africa Analysis*, most press comment on the Starushenko speech has tended to place too much emphasis on the apparent controversy between him and Goncharov. This is a common mistake on the part of journalists with insufficient experience in analysing Soviet politics. Unfortunately, this has created the impression that there is a fundamental difference between these two views on the future orientation of Soviet policy towards South Africa.

As this article will show, there is no fundamental contradiction between the two leading members of the Africa Institute. In fact, apart from the question of white minority rights, they agree on almost everything. And since I am the author of the then anonymously published piece in *Africa Analysis*, I feel that it is necessary to place the Starushenko/Goncharov controversy into perspective again.

The background of "new realism" under Gorbachev

A more comprehensive look at Soviet policy under Gorbachev is needed to clarify the Starushenko/Goncharov controversy. What is the background and character of Gorbachev's "new realism" and "reform policy"? A few facts should be restated, even though they may be more or less obvious to those who have followed Soviet politics at first hand for some time.

In contrast to the impression sometimes created in the press, Gorbachev is not an isolated figure who took over leadership in the Kremlin just by chance and out of the blue. He rose to the centre of power through the very mechanisms of the bureaucratic system and its dogmatic ideology which he set out to reform. He does not represent an isolated tendency in this system, therefore, but rather a broad feeling of the need for change, however unspecified. To put it another way, he is a systemic expression of the need for change. There may be groups, like the technocratic intelligentsia, which formulate this need more coherently and urgently than others. One insight, however, seems to have become widely accepted in recent years as forming the basis for Gorbachev's reform policy. The Soviet Union is trapped in a state of economic and social stagnation, quite at odds with what its official ideology has been preaching and promising. One has to look hard to find somebody in Moscow who still believes that with the old policy the country will ever be able to surpass the performance of the Western industrialized countries.

On the contrary, there is growing fear that the deeply-rooted desire of many Soviet citizens to see their country as a leading global power will be frustrated, because the Soviet Union is falling increasingly behind. The propagandistic

slogan of an inevitable and permanent "shift in the correlation of forces" in favour of the socialist camp now has a hollow ring.

With respect to the Third World, Soviet writing has become quite explicit on this point in recent years. The successful "counter-offensive of the imperialist forces under the leadership of the US" has become topical. Less explicitly this includes a growing acknowledgement of the waning attraction of Soviet-style socialism for developing countries. To this I would add a personal impression: among the younger and better-trained technocrats in Moscow, in particular, one finds quite a strong desire to come to terms with real facts and real life and to be less confronted with abstract ideological dogmas. It seems to be widely accepted in the Soviet Union that economic and social stagnation is the basic reality of its system. The problem starts with the question of how to remedy the situation; and this is very controversial. People are concerned about what change will mean, not only for the stability of the regime and the country, but also for their personal lives. There is a considerable fear that change involves risk. Life may become more difficult or even very unpleasant, should the window for "glasnost", individual responsibility and free competition in the market-place and at the work-place be opened too wide. One must bear in mind that the inert, authoritarian bureaucratic system with all its economic failures and drastic cut-backs on the personal freedom of most Soviet citizens nevertheless also provides them with a considerable amount of everyday security and guidance many would not like to lose.

It is at this point that the discussion about the character and direction of Gorbachev's reform policy becomes more than academic. Obviously, he and those who support him are convinced that effective economic reforms will not work without far-reaching political and social changes. But will other important groups, like the workers and the older generation of party functionaries, agree to this? The question of whether Gorbachev's reforms will eventually prove substantial — whether they will change the character of Soviet politics — is therefore a legitimate one: as we shall see later, it is also rather difficult to answer.

Soviet Africa policy — change started before Gorbachev

Gorbachev has impressed the Western public with his sophisticated, conciliatory style, which contrasts so markedly with that of his predecessors. On the other hand, this shift in style has led to a mistaken perception of the problem of change in Soviet politics, which is often identified too closely with him personally.

If one turns to Africa, there have been actually very few breathtaking changes during his period in office. It would be more accurate to say that Gorbachev has continued and reinforced changes that began years ago. In retrospect, it is the years 1981 and 1982 that mark the watershed in Soviet policy towards Southern Africa.

In the summer of 1981, the USSR and the other member-countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) unanimously opposed Mozambique's application to upgrade its observer status in the organization to full membership.⁶ Mozambique had been trying hard since the beginning of 1980 to obtain membership of CMEA, and this rejection was a heavy blow for President Machel and for Frelimo's socialist option, since integration into the Eastern Bloc's economic system had formed part of the party's agenda since its Third Congress in 1977.

Mozambique also experienced disillusionment in its attempts to achieve greater military co-operation with the Soviet Union. In May and June 1982, the increasingly precarious security situation within Mozambique triggered a flurry of visits to the Soviet Union and urgent talks about increased military aid. No significant increase in military aid was noted, however, contrary to conventional Western expectations about Soviet expansionism in Africa. Here, after all, was a classic situation of conflict and instability, which Moscow, according to conventional wisdom, should not have hesitated to exploit. And, indeed, with the Soviets already having a strong military presence in Angola, this was a unique opportunity to close the pincer movement on mineral-rich South Africa, a development feared by many Western global strategists.

Moscow's refusal to admit Mozambique to CMEA or to defend it effectively against the South African-supported Mozambican National Resistance

Movement (Renamo) severely jolted Frelimo's pro-Eastern option. In February and March 1983, Machel, accompanied by his Foreign Affairs Minister, Joaquim Chissano, paid another visit to Moscow. There they met Yuri Andropov, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, and Defence Minister Dimitri Ustinov, to inform the Soviets about Frelimo's preparation for its Fourth Party Congress and, although this was not made public, about Mozambique's decision to seek an accommodation with Pretoria. About two weeks later, Machel for the first time publicly acknowledged that talks were being held with South Africa in order to achieve such an accommodation.

By this time Maputo had already signalled a shift in its stance of "socialist solidarity" with East Germany, in accordance with which the Mozambican government had refused to recognize West Germany's claims to West Berlin, despite the fact that this denial effectively cut off West German or multilateral EEC development aid. In August 1982, however, Mozambique signed the "Berlin Clause" in a food agreement concluded with West Germany, and followed this by announcing its willingness to participate in the Lomé III negotiations, thus paving the way for its formal reintegration into the Western economic system.

In April 1983 the Fourth Frelimo Party Congress continued this process by taking a series of important decisions concerning the country's future economic orientation. Agricultural development policy was redirected away from centralized state farming towards more support for small-scale family farming. Planning and implementation of economic policy in general were to become more decentralized, and a number of commodity prices were deregulated. These initiatives were followed by a new investment code, which came into force on 6 September 1984. This code not only facilitates joint ventures involving foreign and Mozambican state and private capital, but allows for the establishment of wholly foreign-owned companies, which are offered safeguards in respect of nationalization and a guaranteed right to transfer their profits abroad in hard currency. In the same month, Mozambique was finally accepted into the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. It came as a considerable surprise to many ob-

servers that Frelimo had far fewer reservations about agreeing to the IMF's market-oriented approach than a number of other African governments not generally recognized as close ideological allies of Moscow.

Further practical steps, not to be elaborated here, gave evidence of Frelimo's sincerity in implementing its changed approach. Even in the military field, a differentiation of ties was attempted by requesting various Western countries for military aid. Britain, already fairly involved in the Frontline states through its military training and support programme in Zimbabwe, was the first Western country to take up this new cue. The British military advisory group in Zimbabwe now also began to train Mozambican military personnel.

In 1987 President Chissano toured several West European capitals. Again, it was above all the Thatcher government which felt that his plea for more assistance, including military aid, should be taken seriously. London promised to extend its military aid programme, quite in contrast to the policy advocated by some conservative groups in Washington.

Other Western European governments have since followed the British approach. Paris, for example, started talks with Maputo about some form of military assistance, while the European Economic Commission (EEC) acknowledged the need to help Mozambique defend its development projects. In November 1987, Chancellor Kohl decided to be the first West German leader ever to visit war-torn, socialist-oriented Mozambique.

In the United States conservative groups and think-tanks like the Heritage Foundation have shown clearly why they object to closer ties with the Frelimo government. Frelimo has not officially abandoned either its socialist orientation or its military ties with the Eastern Bloc. And this much is true: the Fourth Party Congress has reconfirmed the leading role of the party — although the importance of "proletarian class struggle" as the ideological justification for Frelimo's leadership was played down in comparison with the position taken at the 1977 party congress. These conservatives therefore dismiss the idea of wooing Frelimo away from the socialist camp as naive and wishful thinking, falling into the well-known trap of Leninist tacticians who aim to get as

much milk as possible from the capitalist cow without yielding the "commanding heights" of power.

This fear brings us back to the problem of how to analyse Soviet politics in a time of change, for although the fears of conservatives in Washington may be correct, they may equally prove to amount to a self-fulfilling prophecy which undercuts Frelimo's "opening to the West".

Is the change in Soviet politics merely tactical in nature?

In all his statements about reform Gorbachev has made clear that his policy is not about giving up socialism, but about its transformation. To expect anything else would indeed be naive. As an ideology, Soviet-type socialism — which is to say, Marxism-Leninism — is too comprehensively institutionalized in Soviet life, politics and thinking to be abandoned at short notice.

Western analysts are therefore confronted with a formidable methodological problem: how is one to assess the quality, significance and durability of change in Soviet politics? As Nel's assessment of an alleged divergence between Tikhomirov and Starushenko demonstrated, even the protagonists' use of orthodox, rigid Leninist language is no certain guide to their thinking on reform policy. There is, in fact, a great deal of orthodox ideological language in Starushenko's speech.

The problem of avoiding a tactical Leninist trap is compounded by the fact that Soviet politicians and writers have repeatedly advised socialist-oriented governments in the Third World to follow the example of Lenin's "New Economic Policy" (NEP). This would seem to be a strong argument in support of those who see most changes in Soviet Africa policy as merely tactical. On the other hand, there is a powerful argument against this interpretation. For some time there have been a number of Sovietologists pointing out that a series of quantitative changes may well add up to a change in quality, even against the will of the initiators.

The 1981 decision not to admit Mozambique to CMEA seems to be a good example of this dynamic. While it may not have been intended as a strategic decision, it eventually assumed this character because it was followed by

another similar decision with regard to Ethiopia, thus shattering not only an important pillar of Mozambique's socialist option but also those of other socialist-oriented countries. In 1985 Mengistu's Ethiopia was refused full membership of CMEA, despite its endeavours to perform as a very loyal ideological ally. Mengistu took great pains to convince Soviet leaders that Ethiopia could well play a Cuban-style role in Africa, as a platform for far-reaching Soviet revolutionary and military interests in Africa. His offers to train thousands of South African guerrillas are to be seen in this perspective. However, Ethiopia's application for full membership was also turned down unanimously by all Eastern Bloc countries. Moscow and its allies were simply not prepared to pay the economic price of another Cuba. This was a clear message to all socialist-oriented countries in and around Africa — including the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen — that Moscow had drawn the line after accepting Cuba, Vietnam and Laos as full members of CMEA, and was not willing to give the same treatment to other socialist-oriented states. Most African Marxists, like those in Mozambique, have understood the message and now give far more thought to ways of co-operating with the dominant institutions of the Western-dominated world economy, like the IMF and the World Bank.

The fact that the CMEA decisions were not just tactical becomes even more obvious if one looks at their background. Soviet thinking on the existing world economic order has changed substantially. Studies by Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, Jerry Hough and others have shown convincingly that leading Soviet economists no longer adopt such a very antagonistic position towards a global economy clearly dominated by the capitalist countries.⁸ They feel that Soviet economic interests are better served by pushing for reforms than by fighting for its abolition. The Khrushchevian hope of destroying capitalism by creating anti-imperialist "zones of peace" in the Third World, closely connected with the East Bloc, is a thing of the past.

This alteration of outlook on the economic world order has made it much less important politically for the socialist camp to draw developing countries into their "socialist international division of labour". The costs of such a policy are

now given more careful consideration, since the budgets of the Soviet Union and its East European allies are already overburdened with supporting the weak economies of Cuba, Vietnam and Laos. They will think twice before including another poor Third World country on their payroll.

There are other areas where it can be shown that it is much too simplistic to dismiss changes in Soviet politics under Gorbachev as merely tactical. But let us return briefly to the NEP argument, which is far more ambivalent with regard to the tactical character of changes in Soviet politics than is realized by most of those who refer to it.

Lenin himself never made clear whether NEP amounted to a fundamental change in policy or simply a tactical retreat. And, surprisingly, to this day the debate among Soviet NEP specialists provides no conclusive answer.⁹ There are basically two schools of thought. One, which may be called the Stalinist one, by and large corresponds to the conventional position among Western observers. It views Lenin's decision to stop collectivization and centralization and to revitalize trade, market relations and private initiative as just temporary retreats, which did not alter Lenin's basic approach to socialism, later so crudely executed by Stalin. There are others, however, who challenge this view. They point to the fact that when Lenin put his proposals to the party they caused a great deal of controversy and opposition, precisely because many of his comrades feared that the changes were more than tactical. They looked as if they might herald a shift from a centrally-planned economy to a mixed economy in which private sectors would co-exist with public ones.

Already in the 1960s, and again in recent years, this controversy about the dual character of NEP became a significant issue in Soviet writing. Under Gorbachev the second school of thought seems to have gained ground, for the obvious reason that if the rather far-reaching reforms which Gorbachev and leading economists appear to have in mind can be represented as authentic interpretations of Lenin's thinking, they will be much easier to legitimize and to implement. For most Soviet citizens Lenin is the unchallenged authority when it comes to ideology, even in the Gorbachev era.

In the case of the Third World countries the NEP argument therefore has to be seen in its full ambiguity. Superficially it has a tactical function, in that it helps Soviet politicians and experts to advise their ideological allies on how to handle certain economic changes forced upon them by economic realities, without having to admit openly that their problems might be a consequence of adopting models based on orthodox Marxism-Leninism. Beyond that, however, the NEP analogy does not clarify whether these steps and practices should be seen as of a tactical character only or if they indicate a substantial change.

There is another important aspect of the NEP discussion that is hardly ever mentioned. Some Soviet and East European writers have used the argument of NEP in Third World countries in the 1970s and early 1980s as a metaphor to address indirectly similar problems in the Soviet economy and Marxism-Leninism in general. A good example of this is to be found in an article on the problems of transition to socialism in underdeveloped countries, written by A P Butenko from the Institute for Economy of the Socialist World System in 1982.¹⁰ His analysis of the failure of agricultural policy in socialist-oriented developing countries reads like a radical critique of the Soviet agricultural model and its inability to compete with Western countries in terms of productivity. In 1982 Butenko was still an outsider and his writing was heavily criticized. In the meantime, the mainstream has moved to the kind of thinking that he and other economists represent.

This short discussion of the problem of tactics and changes in Soviet policy may suffice for us to draw the following conclusions: an approach that attempts to judge these changes on the level of either/or — either socialism is abandoned or change is insignificant — does not work. By definition it will fail to understand those changes in Gorbachev's reform policy — as well as those in Mozambique, and other countries — which in the practical dimension of East/West and Third World policy are very important. There are obviously a number of changes of more than tactical significance, however, which will still fail to satisfy the demands of those who seek the public defeat of Marxism-Leninism.

In the field of Soviet policy towards Africa, socio-economic realities in the developing countries and the much narrower limits set by the Soviet Union's own system, especially in the field of economics, have compelled Soviet experts and politicians to rethink their aims, methods and ideological dogmas. Though the Kremlin has certainly nursed hegemonic desires at times, these have turned out to be but world revolutionary dreams. The aggressive anti-imperialist and pro-socialist policies and rhetoric of the Khrushchev era have given way to a much more careful and realistic posture with regard to the developing countries. This is a continuing and very contradictory process. Old style Marxist-Leninist language may coexist in Soviet writings and statements with almost dramatically frank descriptions of the problems of Soviet and socialist affairs in Africa.

Few, however, will go as far as the Soviet journalist, Boris Asoyan, who in a recent article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* criticizes the "distorted ideas" and "bureaucratic platitudes" which have governed Soviet coverage of Africa in the past. However, as Kridl Valkenier and Hough have shown in their books, there is now a wide range of opinions, even quite controversial ones, in Soviet writing about how to deal with the problem of socialist orientation in the Third World.

This, of course, has not left untouched Moscow's approach towards the conflict in South Africa.

What has changed in Soviet policy towards South Africa?

With the general background for changes in Soviet African policy clarified, it is easier to interpret Moscow's new attitudes on the race conflict. The striking fact about the statements of the two deputy directors of the Africa Institute is how much they agree about South Africa. In fact, they agree on all major aspects, excluding the question of white minority rights. Like Starushenko before him, Goncharov, in his Harare statements, did not conceal the growing scepticism in Moscow about the chances of implementing socialism in African countries. He advised the ANC to stress in its policy the "national liberation struggle" rather than the quest for socialism. He told the inter-

viewer from *Work in Progress* that he believed that South Africa would eventually become socialist, but "maybe not in 25 years, but in a century" — and this from someone who considers himself to be an optimist.

Goncharov's remarks reflect a curious contradiction that one also encounters among other analysts in Moscow — the time span within which socialism, or more precisely orthodox Marxism-Leninism, will be realized is constantly being extended, the more time that is spent on implementing it. This kind of time-stretching is one way for Soviet ideologues and analysts to bridge the gap between the increasing difficulties of reconciling Marxist-Leninist models in the real world with the abstract dogma of being victorious in the end. In a recent article, one well-known Soviet writer on developing countries, Georgy Mirsky, was rather blunt on this aspect. He wrote:

A sober assessment of the present day situation shows, we ought to admit, that today there is less evidence than a quarter of a century ago that the newly-independent states are abandoning the capitalist road of development and shifting to the non-capitalist course.¹¹

Goncharov, like Starushenko, stressed that the Southern African region is of little importance to either the Soviet Union or the United States. Indeed, he claimed that Soviet interest in the region was even less than that of the USA — which is something of a simplification, considering Soviet involvement in Angola. From this perspective, he and others see a reasonable common ground for an acceptable settlement. It is worth noting that he named neither a Soviet document, nor one from the ANC/SACP alliance, as a basis for such a common approach, but rather the report of the US Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on South Africa. It would have been difficult to imagine such a gesture some years ago.

The most important message, to be found both in Starushenko's and in Goncharov's statement, is this: Moscow is concerned that an uncontrolled escalation of violence will lead to increased tensions between the two global powers. At present this concern enjoys priority over the rather dubious expectations of making ideological gains in South Africa. The Soviet Union does not want events in Southern Africa to interfere with its much higher-ranking interests of continuing the Reykjavik

process with Washington. For this reason the quest for a negotiated settlement has become central to Soviet South Africa policy. In his speech in honour of President Chissano of Mozambique's visit to Moscow in August 1987, Gorbachev strongly emphasized the need for a political solution, whereas he did not bother even to mention the armed struggle.

In accordance with this shift of emphasis, Soviet and American diplomats, as well as those of other Western powers, now meet more regularly to discuss developments in Southern Africa. In September 1986 events took an even more dramatic turn: for the first time, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed on the question of how to handle South Africa's membership of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The result was that South Africa will not be expelled, which amounts to a slap in the face for anti-apartheid movements and most black African countries, ignoring their long-held position of isolating the white minority regime, above all in the field of nuclear politics. Of course there are very practical reasons for the two superpowers wanting to keep South Africa in the IAEA. They hope that this will make it easier to control South Africa's nuclear activities.

Do leaders in the Kremlin dislike Starushenko's remarks on white minority rights? Goncharov's statement in Harare may create that impression. But this needs some clarification. Starushenko himself made clear in an interview with a West German journalist, who travelled to Moscow to check the report in *Africa Analysis*, that his opinion is not to be taken as official government policy. And Goncharov is correct to state that there is no official line in the Africa Institute on white minority rights. Such an official line would in any case be quite uncommon for an Institute of the Academy of Science. Members of such institutes scarcely ever claim to represent official government policy or even a uniform institute line of policy, since this would belie their claims to be "independent" research institutes. It would, however, be a mistake to conclude from Goncharov's statement that Starushenko's visionary view on white minority rights is isolated in the Institute. In fact, there is quite a range of different opinions on how to treat this question. Western experts on Southern Africa, from the USA as well as from Europe,

who have had talks in the Africa Institute, or with members of the Africa Institute, have gained this impression, too. There is a diversity of opinions about the importance of Inkatha, Azapo and other movements in South Africa.

It may well be that the discussion amongst Soviet Africanists on white minority rights was sparked off by the regular meetings they have with American scholars. Professor Price from Berkeley has pointed to the fact that only a few weeks before Starushenko gave his speech at the Soviet-African conference in Moscow, one of the regular meetings between American and Soviet Africanists took place. At that time nobody in the Soviet delegation seemed to have any specific ideas about white minority rights. The books about "consociationalism" did not seem to be familiar to them. For instance, it was only through the American scholars that the Soviets learned about Arend Lijphart's book "Power sharing in South Africa".

However the ideas about white minority rights got into Starushenko's speech, there is little reason to believe that the Kremlin sees their controversial discussion amongst Soviet analysts as a big problem. Quite the contrary may be true. In his speech in honour of Chissano's visit to Moscow in August 1987, Gorbachev stressed the need for "new ideas" in the search for a political solution in South Africa. It is in this context that the Starushenko/Goncharov controversy has to be located with respect to its significance for Soviet policy. As mentioned before, there is nothing new about Soviet Third World experts having different opinions about certain questions. It is, however, a new feature that they discuss them so openly in the public international arena. "Glasnost" has reached Soviet Africa policy.

Unlike the academics, the Soviet government will see little reason to publicly commit itself to a fixed position on white minority rights or other details of a negotiated settlement. Such a step would unnecessarily limit its diplomatic flexibility. It would also be counter-productive to the position of the ANC/SACP alliance in a future negotiating process, needlessly giving away a bargaining-chip.

Nevertheless, Moscow has taken pains to signal that it prefers a negotiated settlement to an uncontrolled es-

calation of violence, and that the fears of whites have to be addressed in such a settlement. Furthermore, there are a number of people in Moscow who consider it a matter of "Realpolitik" not to exclude Inkatha from the negotiating table, although this movement is disliked because of its tribal character. Ethnic problems are, however, taken very seriously by Soviet scholars and politicians, not least because of experience in other African countries. Accommodation, not exclusion, is thought to be the only viable approach to guarantee a peaceful and stable post-apartheid South Africa.

For all that, there are a few essentials which Soviet South Africa policy will not abandon in the foreseeable future. The participation of the ANC/SACP alliance as the main anti-apartheid actor in a negotiating process is a condition *sine qua non* for the Soviets. Speculation that the Soviets might give up their support for the ANC and the armed struggle is unfounded. The continuation of this struggle, conducted with rather limited means anyway, will be part of Moscow's as well as the ANC's strategy: neither see a contradiction between armed struggle and a political solution. It is one instrument among others to bring white South Africans and those who rule in Pretoria to the negotiating table. But, as mentioned before, Starushenko and Goncharov have put most emphasis on the labour struggle and better political organization.

In the final analysis it is not the question of violence that divides the Botha government and the ANC/SACP leadership, because both claim that they are prepared to negotiate. It is whether these negotiations are to be about only limited power-sharing between blacks and whites — power sharing without losing control, as P W Botha has called it — or full power sharing.

It may well be that Starushenko's remarks initially caused an irritation in the ANC and SACP leadership because of the extent of change in Soviet South Africa policy under Gorbachev. The reaction to the *Africa Analysis* article in *The African Communist* points in that direction. In the meantime, however, fears seem to have calmed down. During Oliver Tambo's visit to Moscow in 1987, Gorbachev is said to have given him assurances on the continuity of Soviet South Africa policy. On the other

hand, in recent public statements, the ANC as well as the SACP have made it clear that they, like the Soviets, now put much more emphasis on a political solution. In an interview, Joe Slovo, the leader of the SACP and former chief of staff of the ANC's guerrilla organization Umkhonto We Sizwe, said: "I believe the transition in South Africa is coming through negotiations."¹²

Concluding remarks: What about Angola?

South African Defence Minister, General Magnus Malan, has made public statements on Soviet policy in Southern Africa which are strongly at variance with the assessment presented in this article. Talking of Mozambique, he said in October 1987: "I have no doubt the USSR sees Mozambique as one of its instruments to be used to reach its eventual goal in the Republic of South Africa."¹³ He continued in this vein one month later — after South African troops had gone into Angola to help Unita: "South Africa had had to halt Russian aggression in Southern Angola . . . Russia's ultimate target is South Africa."¹⁴

In the case of Mozambique, the analysis presented here argues that Malan is mistaken. In Mozambique nobody is on the offensive with respect to Pretoria. The Soviets would have made different decisions in 1981/82, had they seriously been trying to establish a firm grip on the Republic.

The case of Angola is more complex. There is no denying the huge amount of military aid given to the MPLA government by Cuba and the Soviet Union, although South African sources overstate the direct Soviet involvement in recent fighting at least as much as the Angolans understate it. But I believe that Malan's interpretation of Soviet support is flawed. Neither Angola's own policy nor Soviet policy towards Angola have remained untouched by the lessons learned since the late 1970s. The MPLA government is undertaking

changes in the economic field closely resembling those of the Frelimo government in Mozambique, the strong Cuban and Soviet military presence notwithstanding. Angola has applied for membership in the IMF, World Bank, International Development Association (IDA) and International Finance Corporation (IFC), all of which are dominated by the Western countries. Together with this request, President dos Santos has announced a programme to rehabilitate the economy and the financial situation of the country. Western experts see this as a major departure from earlier economic policies. Private initiative and private ownership will have a significant role to play in Angola's economy.

Why then do the Soviets continue to invest so heavily on the military level? To answer this question, a further aspect of Gorbachev's "new realism" has to be addressed. Like his predecessors, he is not contemplating giving up the claim that the Soviet Union is a global power equal to the United States, at least on the military level. An open defeat of the MPLA government by Unita, supported with military hardware and advice by South Africa and the USA, would, in Soviet eyes, create an intolerable loss of credibility in respect of this status. For it is above all Angola which in the mid-1970s became a symbol of Soviet superpower status. For most Soviets it seems to be a matter of national pride, rather than the hope of turning Angola into a showcase for Marxism-Leninism in Africa, to prevent the MPLA from being defeated by Unita and its allies.

In other words: Angola is no longer — if it ever was — the staging post for a Soviet military grip on the Republic of South Africa. It has become a testing-ground for the global military status of the superpowers and a convenient one at that, since it does not directly touch on the vital interests of either. Because of its becoming enmeshed with South Africa's aggressive regional policies and unresolved ethnic problems this conflict has become very nasty indeed. The Angolans, on both sides of the war,

are the ones who suffer, in human as well as in economic terms. If somebody should find the clue to untangling the Gordian knot of Namibia's independence and national reconciliation in Angola, Moscow will not refuse to listen to him.

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