WORKERS' LIBERTY

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Breaking the chains



Black workers and the struggle for liberation in South Africa

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"The emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself."
Karl Marx.

"The workers, after winning political power, will smash the old bureaucratic apparatus, shatter it to its very foundations, and raze it to the ground; they will replace it by a new one, consisting of the very same workers and employees, against whose transformation into bureaucrats the measures will at once be taken which were specified in detail by Marx and Engels: (1) not only election, but also recall at any time; (2) pay not to exceed that of a worker; (3) immediate introduction of control and supervision by all, so that all may become 'bureaucrats' for a time, and that, therefore, nobody may be able to become a 'bureaucrat'."
Lenin.



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Sections of this magazine are adapted from a pamphlet by Bob Fine and Lawrence Welch, 'A Question of Solidarity', published by the Socialist Forum for South Africa Solidarity in 1982; from an article on the ANC by Bob Fine which appeared in Workers' Action no. 161, December 8, 1979; and from a previously unpublished paper by Bob Fine on the struggle in South Africa from the 1940s to the 1960s.

Facts and information for the other sections have been drawn especially from the following books:

International Defence and Aid Fund, 'Apartheid: the facts'.

Hilda Bernstein, 'For their triumphs and for their tears: women in apartheid South Africa' (IDAF).

Barbara Rogers, 'Divide and rule: South Africa's Bantustans (IDAF).

Jack and Ray Simons, 'Class and colour in South Africa, 1850-1950' (IDAF).

Denis MacShane, Martin Plant and David War, 'Power! Black workers, their unions, and the struggle for freedom in South Africa' (Spokesman).

Jill Nattrass, 'The South African economy: its growth and change'.

Duncan Innes, 'Anglo-American and the rise of modern South Africa'.

Geoffrey Wheatcroft, 'The Randlords'.

Close to revolution

South Africa is close to revolution. In August 1984 elections for the powerless new Coloured and Asian assemblies were convincingly boycotted. Despite repression, the meetings and rallies of the boycott campaign became the start of a big mobilisation.

The first big violent clashes were on September 3, during protests against rent rises in black townships. Many of the occasions on which police have opened fire since then have been at funerals of victims of previous repression.

On September 17 black gold miners strucj — legally — for the first time. But hundreds of miners were wounded when police attacked strike meetings.

On November 6-7 there was a 48 hour general strike in Transvaal against rises in rents and electricity and water charges. The police followed up by arresting South Africa's leading black trade union leaders.

In March 1985, police opened fire on a peaceful funeral demonstration at Langa.

According to official figures they killed 19 blacks, but the unofficial count was around 45 dead.

At the end of April, two gold-mine companies — Anglovaal and Anglo-American — sacked, respectively, 300 and 14,400 black miners for unofficial strikes against victimisation of union activists.

After talks with the union, the companies said they would take some workers back, but the rest were deported to Bantustans or neighbouring countries.

General strike

In May Andries Raditsela, an executive member of one of the main non-racial trade union groups, FOSATU, was injured so severely in police detention that he died one hour after being released. FOSATU called a one-day general strike in protest.

By June some 300 blacks had been shot by police. In July large-scale clashes between police and blacks spread to Soweto, until then relatively quiet.

On July 20 the government declared a state of emergency, and 119 people were immediately arrested. The police were empowered to arrest anyone without a warrant and hold them for 14 days.

Trade unions have played a central part in the struggle. There have been dozens of strikes, on issues ranging from the planned New Zealand rugby tour through civil rights to victimisations and pay.

As we go to press, the biggest black union, the 150,000 strong National Union of Mineworkers, is due to start a strike in the gold mines over pay.

The regime and the capitalist class have been under severe pressure since the dramatic Soweto uprising of 1976. They have tried to combine limited reform with crushing repression.

In 1981 a labour law reform was initiated which extended the legal sphere of operation of black trade unions. Trade unions with African members had been legally excluded from the official industrial relations system in 1953.

Now the state intended to control and incorporate trade unions by subjecting them to an official framework. But the result of these reforms has been a considerable strengthening of the movement.

Some employers decided to try to come to terms with the unions. The black working class upsurge that started in 1973 showed no sign of ending, and to deal with unions would be better, as one manager put it, than to try "to negotiate with 1500 workers on a football field".

The giant Anglo-American corporation gave the NUM recruiting facilities in its mines.

The employers, like the government, were disappointed. It was the same Anglo-American that sacked 14,400 striking miners this April.

In 1983 the government announced its constitutional reforms. It set up a tripartite parliament, one house for whites, one for Asians and one for Coloureds. Africans were not included on the ground that

There are three main forces in the movement against the white racist state.

The United Democratic Front is a coalition of 645 affiliated groups and claims a membership of over two million.

Taking up the banner of the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela, it is formally a non-racial grouping and has attracted a number of leading liberal figures like Bishop Tutu to its ranks.

It has not managed to win over the bulk of the organised working class, however.

Most of the unions reckon that any independent working class voice would be lost if they became just another few of 600-odd groups in the UDF, with no adequate structure to ensure that their organised strength was not swamped by middle-class groups.

While cooperating with the UDF on particular actions, they have not affiliated, and on occasions they have clashed with the UDF when it seemed to be making ill-considered calls for strike action over the heads of the unions.

The second of the major liberation forces within the country is that centred around Black Consciousness and the National Forum. The main group within this circle is AZAPO.

Within this grouping there is a wide diversity of views, ranging from black separatism on the nationalist side to socialists and Trotskyists on the working class side. There is no ban on whites joining, but anti-whiteness co-mingles with its greater emphasis on socialism.

What links its various threads together is, partly, a common negative opposition to what they term as 'charterism' — emphasis on the ANC's South African Freedom Charter which they tend to think of as contaminated by liberalism; and partly a common commitment to non-cooperation with or boycott of all state institutions.

This has strained their relations with most of the trade union movement, which naturally work within as well as outside official structures of negotiation.

A flavour of what separates them from the UDF can be gained from their respective handling of the visit by US Senator Edward Kennedy.

The UDF acted as Kennedy's host and expects much from his support for the sanctions campaign in the States. The National Forum boycotted Kennedy and on a number of occasions blocked him from speaking.

There is no love lost between supporters of the UDF and of the National Forum. Several killings and firebombings have been reported.

The third major force inside South Africa is the black workers' trade union movement. This movement is divided partly by political and partly by organisational differences.

Unaligned

Politically, the influence of the UDF and of the National Forum is strong in some unions, but the vast bulk of the movement is unaligned and espouses either trade union "independence" (with a more or less strong syndicalist bent) or allegiance to a working class political movement yet to be formed.

The unions collaborated with the UDF on the stay-at-home in the Transvaal in November, but after that there was considerable criticism from within the ranks of FOSATU (the largest trade union federation) that workers had not been adequately consulted prior to the action — and that the leadership was behaving too much like a middle class nationalist leadership, calling on workers to do this and that but not involving the workers in planning or decision-making.

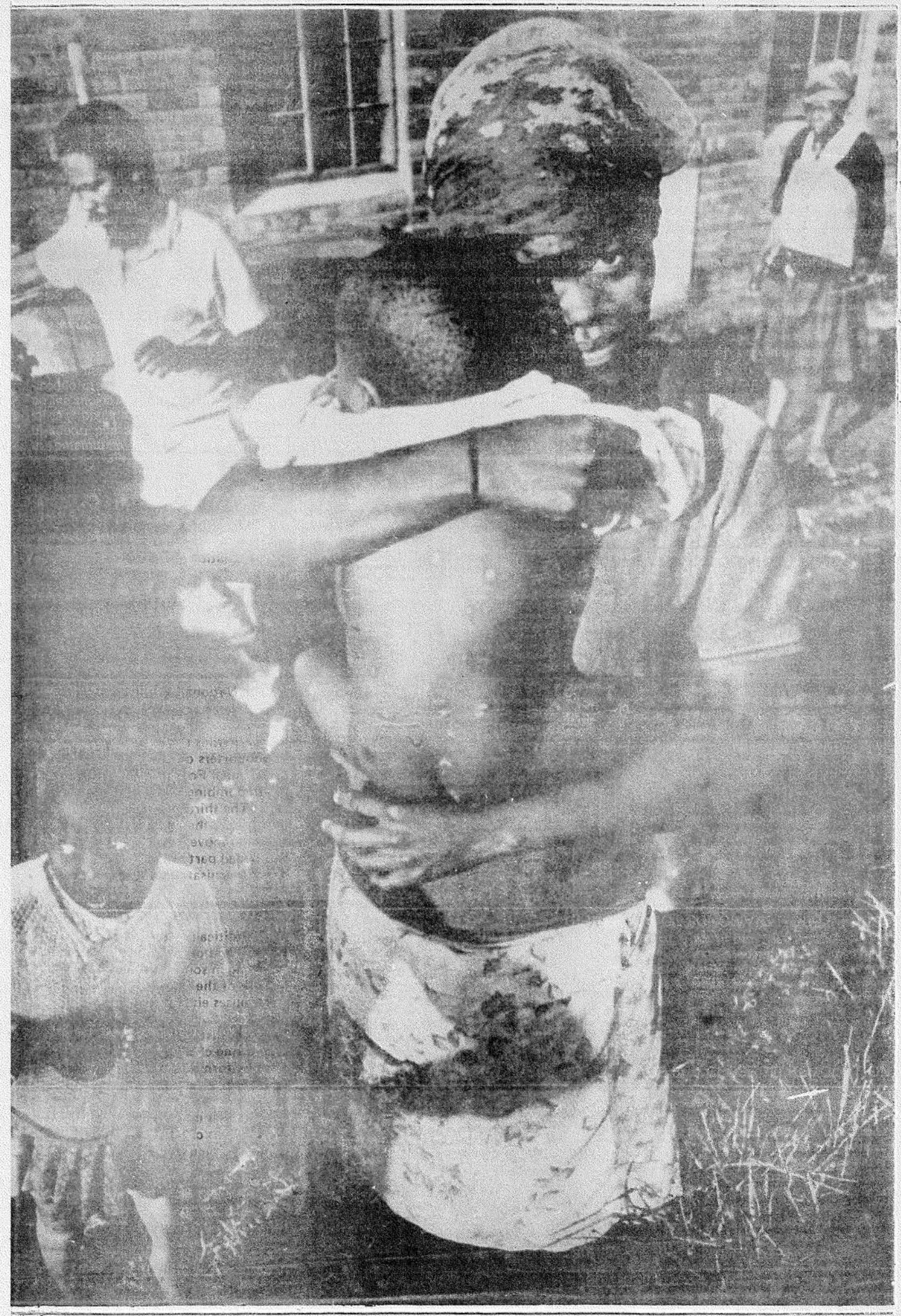


Photo: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF)



Squatters evicted

Africans already had their own self government in the Bantustans. At the same time, the government consolidated the power of the state executive and military and put off the next general election until at least 1989.

The elections for the Coloured and Asian assemblies were successfully boycotted in August 1984.

The government also extended its scheme for black local councils, which include Africans. These too were boycotted and collaborating black councillors have been a major target for demonstrators during recent unrest.

By late July five councillors had been killed and 147 had resigned. Only two councils out of 38 were functioning.

The first group of 120 black 'peace officers' graduated in Soweto in May to serve under and protect the councillors. Considerable financial and patronage incentives have been put in the way of black councillors as inducements to volunteer. But the government is not finding it easy to find candidates.

More recently the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts, which banned marriage and sex between individuals of different 'races' have been repealed. The pass laws have been relaxed, to allow for easier movement for qualified blacks within the white urban areas, and to allow for easier access for blacks to the black urban townships.

Halt

A right to hold freehold tenure in urban areas has been conceded to Africans. There has been a temporary halt to all forced removals of black people from zones designated as 'white' and a permanent halt to forced removals for about 700,000 potentially threatened blacks.

South African citizenship is to be granted to Africans living in the Bantustans. The law banning representatives of one 'racial' group from interfering in the political affairs of another (which for example, meant that Asian representatives were not permitted to discuss white affairs, etc.), has been repealed.

Neither these reforms, nor the bloody repression, have yet achieved their aims. On the contrary: the reforms have increased blacks' self-confidence, the repression has increased their active anger.

The regime still has substantial strength. Despite some (mostly diehard ultra-racist) dissent, it has fairly solid support among whites, about 16% of the population.

It has a huge machinery of repression. Between 1961 and 1981 South Africa increased expenditure on its armed forces 40-fold. The paramilitary South African Police was increased from a strength of 27,000 to 77,000; the South African Defence Force, from 79,000 to 515,000.

Compulsory conscription for adult white males was introduced in 1967. Call-up periods were extended in 1977 and 1982.

South African governments have long sought to foster divisions not only between black and white but also between different black groups — between Africans, Coloureds (mixed-race), and Indians, and between different language-groups of Africans. Since the early 1950s they have tried to develop, through the Bantustans, a group of black stooges to help them police the African population.

Their success has been limited. Most of the new black-based trade unions define themselves as non-racial. The United Democratic Front is multi-racial.

The other main component of the mobilisation against the regime, the black consciousness movement, defines 'black' to include African, Coloured, and Indian without distinction.

But there are divisions and problems. In Natal, Chief Buthelezi, chief minister of the KwaZulu homeland, leads the Inkatha movement with some support among Zulus. In early August this movement played a role in riots in Durban where numbers of Indians were killed by Africans.

In Port Elizabeth some militant black youth have been known to attack black trade unionists, considering them to be 'collaborators'.

Coherent

Five per cent of the South African Defence Force strength (as of 1981) is black, but over 20% of operationally deployed forces. Almost 50% of regular South African Police (excluding reserves) are black. These black soldiers and police could be an Achilles heel for the regime.

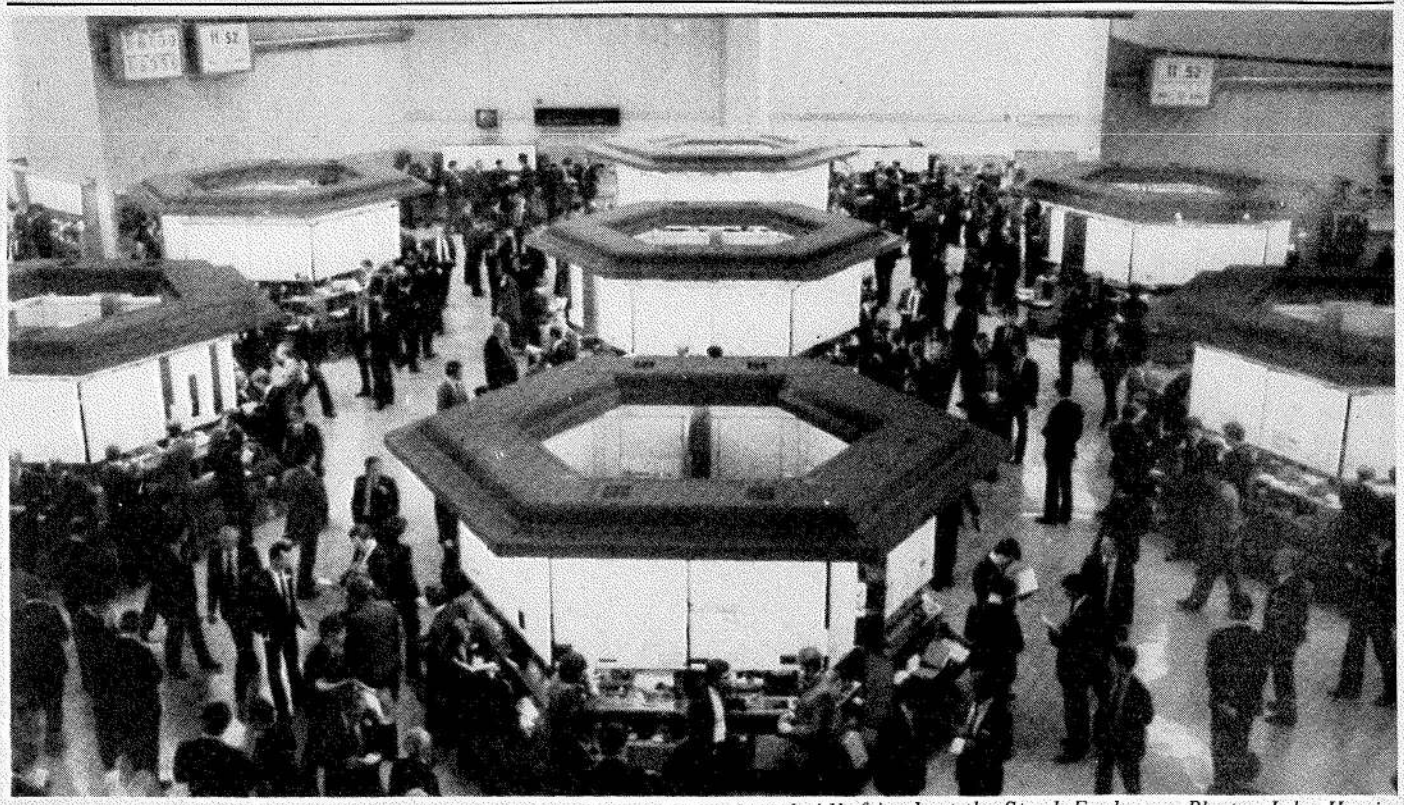
But the vast, sprawling black revolt needs a coherent leadership and strategy. Otherwise it could splutter out in heroic but uncoordinated rebellions, or even turn in on itself in recriminations.



Arrest in downtown Johannesburg



Photo: IDAF



Apartheid's friends at the Stock Exchange. Photo: John Harris.

Apartheid's British friends

Of 2,000-odd multinationals present in South Africa, 1,200 are British.

British capital's total investments in the apartheid state, direct and indirect, are worth about £11 billion — 40 to 45% of all foreign investment in the country. British direct investment in South Africa represents almost 10% of all British investment world-wide.

The biggest British companies in South Africa are ICI (through its associate AECI); Metal Box; Blue Circle; NEI; Dunlop; Barclays; Standard Chartered and Hill Samuel banks. Leyland, Rio Tinto Zinc, Shell and BP also have interests there.

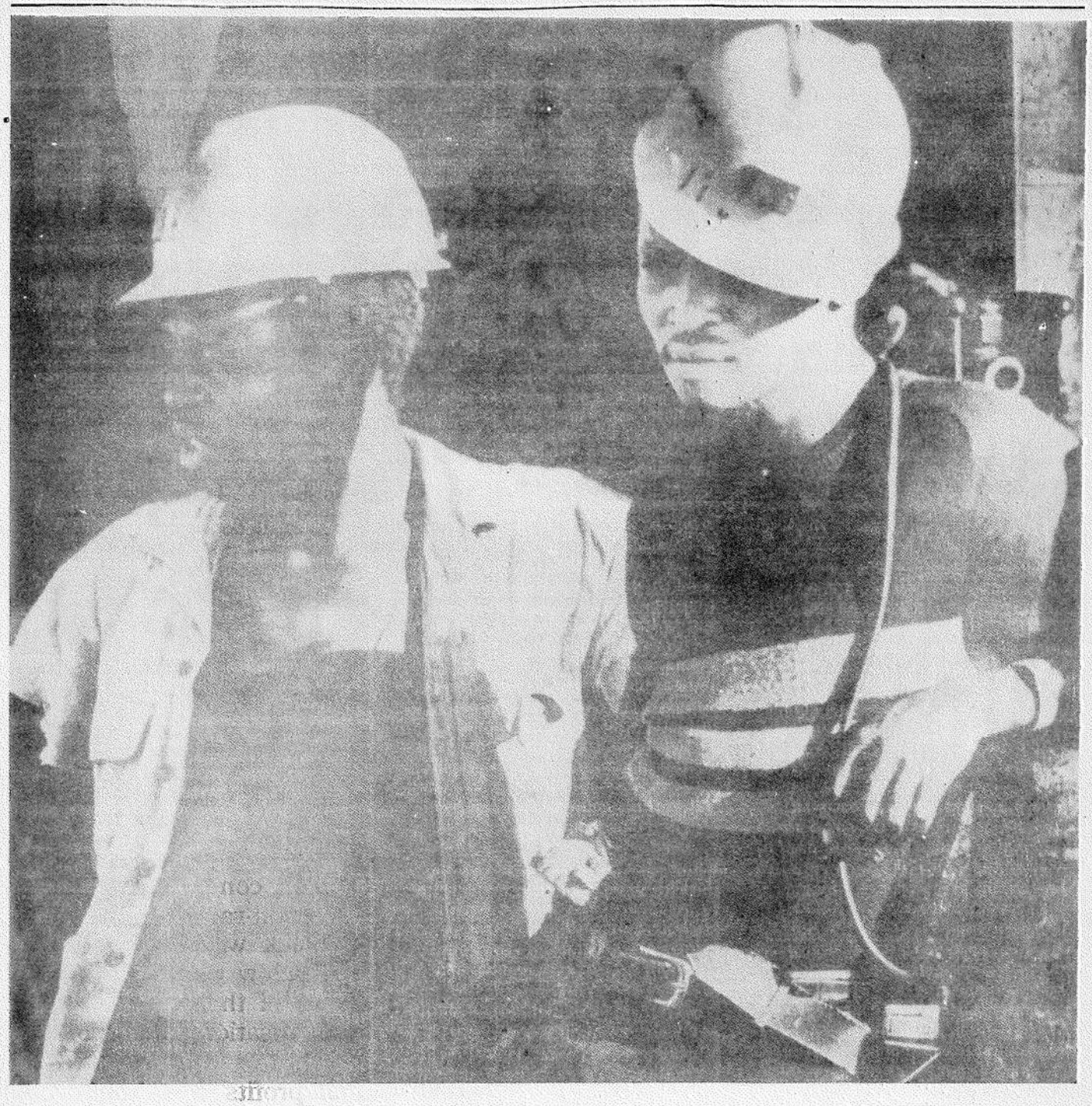
Altogether Britain draws about £1.2 billion per year from South Africa in profits, dividends, and other 'invisibles'. South Africa is, or at least was until recently, one of the most profitable capitalist economies in the world, with rates of return of 25% in mining (14% in the rest of the world) and 18% in manufacturing (13% elsewhere).

As of March this year, only 29 out of the 139 biggest British companies in South Africa recognised non-racial trade unions. At least 1800 black workers in British firms were paid below minimum subsistence levels, most of them employed by the notorious privatisation-merchant Pritchards.

British capital profits from the white-supremacy state. That gives British workers a special responsibility — but also special leverage.

As part of the broad campaign of solidarity with the liberation movement in South Africa, British workers in firms with South African subsidiaries should establish links with the non-racial unions in those firms and take action in Britain to force the firms to concede the non-racial unions' demands.

(Information: International Defence and Aid Fund, 'Apartheid: the facts'; Financial Times, August 2 1985; Economist, March 23 and 30 1985; Morning Star, May 13 1985).



The black working class

Three facts lie behind the current explosion.

One: the collapse of white racist rule in countries surrounding South Africa.

On April 25 1974 Portuguese army officers, driven into rebellion by the impasse of Portugal's colonial wars in Africa, overthrew the dictatorship in Lisbon. In 1975 Mozambique and Angola became independent. South Africa assisted two nationalist groups, FNLA and Unita, which it thought more pliant, against the main nationalist movement, the MPLA. It directly invaded Angola in October 1975. But the MPLA won.

In Zimbabwe the black nationalist movement ZANU took power in 1980, after a long guerilla war.

Thirty or forty years ago, South Africa was one of a vast number of African and Asian countries where a white administration of foreigners or settlers ruled over a black majority. Now it is the only one, apart from its own colony, Namibia.

After the Sharpeville massacre of black protesters in 1960, South Africa brutally and efficiently repressed black opposition. The regime was triumphant, prosperous and seemed dauntingly powerful, until the 1973 strike wave at least.

Now every black militant in South Africa can feel confident that the days of white supremacy are numbered. Whether in one year's time or ten years' time, and after whatever horrors and setbacks, the people will win.

Two: a developing crisis of the economic structure set up in South Africa after 1948 under the policy of apartheid. (This is des-

cribed in the section on Capitalism In South Africa, below).

Three: a big growth of the black working class. In 1960 there were 540,000 black workers in mining and 450,000 in manufacturing. In 1980 there were 740,000 in mining and 1,150,000 in manufacturing.

In January-February 1973, 100,000 black workers — shipbuilders, stevedores, drivers, textile, brick and tea workers — round the Durban area struck over pay. This marked the beginning of a new wave of resistance to white supremacy in South Africa, one in which workers and trade unions became central.

In 1969 there were only about 16,000 organised black workers. In 1981 most observers put the number at over 200,000. While in 1969 about 3000 black workers were involved in stoppages, the figure was near 100,000 for 1981.

Unions have substantially consolidated their grass roots organisation among black industrial workers; they have begun to build themselves into a national organisation. FOSATU — the Federation of South African Trade Unions — was born in 1979.

Unions have struggle for and won scores of recognition agreements with managements who have been pushed to concede to them rights of negotiation, access to the plant, full-time shop stewards, stop-order payments (i.e. the deduction of union dues from the wage packet), grievance procedures and so forth.

Increasingly black workers have shown themselves capable through their unions of winning or partially winning their immediate demands through industrial action or the threat of it. The black trade union movement, as the embryo of a broader working class movement, has become in the last ten years the major organisational form of resistance of black workers.

It is the key to the development of a working class movement in South Africa and its future will shape both the character and efficacy of the struggle against apartheid as a whole.

Why has this development taken place? The underlying cause is that the growth of capitalism in South Africa has also meant the growth of the black working class. And the concentration of capital into ever larger factories has meant the concentration of workers into large collective units.

The development of manufacturing industry has brought with it the concentration of resident black workers in large urban townships and has made possible a rise in the level of education and skills of black workers. Most black workers in manufacturing industry have largely cut their ties with a rural past.

All these causes have contributed to the growth of worker organisation and consciousness.

Black workers have had a long tradition of trade union organisation and activity in South Africa. In 1920 there was a strike of some 70,000 black mineworkers; in the 1920s the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union grew to over 100,000 members; in the late 1920s and 1930s industrial unions like the Garment Workers' fought against the racial divisions which the state was fostering in the workforce; in 1946 there was a massive strike of mineworkers organised by the African Mineworkers' Union and backed by growing industrial unions; in the mid-1950s the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) rapidly mobilised black industrial workers culminating in mass demonstrations and stay-at-homes around the time of Sharpeville in 1960.

However, each of these waves of trade union militancy was eventually contained by the state and the capitalists and met at times with terrible defeats. Most recently, after SACTU was driven underground and then into exile in the early 1960s, the level of organisation and activism among black workers collapsed for a decade, while South African capitalism grew at an unprecedented rate. But it was organising its own gravediggers.

There are two national union federations among black workers. The larger is FOSATU. Committed to building a national federation of industrial unions, it has concentrated on the development of a strong and democratic shop floor base complemented by a structure of trained and accountable officials and shop stewards.

The smaller federation is CUSA (the Council of Unions of South Africa) which was founded in 1980.

SAAWU (the South African Allied Workers' Union) was formed in 1980 as a split off from BAWU, a black consciousness organisation. it tends to concentrate on the linking of community and workplace issues, and to take a high-profile political position on wider struggles against apartheid. As a consequence it has suffered the brunt of state repression.

The GWU (General Workers' Union) has organised predominantly among low-paid African migrant workers in the Cape but is now developing a national organisation in the docks and railways especially, with a commitment to principles of workers' control and trade union independence.

Registered

The FCWU (Food and Canning Workers' Union) is the longest standing of the independent unions and was attached in the past to SACTU. It consists of a 'registered' section of white and coloured workers and a 'parallel' African section (the AFCWU), but the two parts work closely together on a democratic basis. It is based mainly in the Cape.

These and other smaller unions in South Africa comprise what is known as the 'independent trade union movement'.

In spite of severe legal restrictions, they all operate overground and have in common commitments to the organisation of black workers independently both of employers and of the apartheid state. All are formally non-racial though some focus on African workers at the expense of Coloureds and Asians. In many of these unions individuals from the white radical intelligentsia play a key supportive role.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s SACTU was the principal non-racial and independent trade union federation. At its peak in 1960 SACTU organised around 85,000 workers. It was forced into exile and underground after Sharpeville and very few of the 16,000 black workers who were still unionised in 1969 had any contact with SACTU.

Today SACTU is based in exile. It claims to have some level of underground existence in South Africa. It no longer has any affiliated unions but it remains the official trade union wing of the ANC and the South African Communist Party.

In the 1950s and '60s the CP subordinated trade unionism to the politics of the popular front. In the '60s SACTU directed its energies away from organisation in the workplace to support for Umkhonto We Sizwe, the military arm of the ANC. Its specific role included acting as a feeder for Umkhonto We Sizwe by sending some of the best worker militants away from the factories and into the field. Working class organisation was subordinated to the armed struggle rather than the armed struggle being subordinated to working class organisation.

Many trade unionists have reacted by cutting their ties with political movements altogether and by concentrating on the narrow, economic issues of the workplace.

Many of the trade unions which have grown up in the 1970s focussed their energies on building strong organisation on the shop floor, on developing a network of trained shop stewards and union officials, on fighting for improved wages, conditions and for management recognition, and on extending channels of democratic control by rank and file members over the union.

There was a tendency to interpret trade union independence to mean independence from politics altogether. SACTU's problem was seen not so much in terms of the substance of the politics to which it attached trade union organisation, but rather in terms of its attachment to politics altogether.

Trade unionism as such was identified with the interests of the working class; politics with the dominance of the petty bourgeoisie.

Three more or less distinct strands have emerged, sometimes dividing one union from another and sometimes cutting through particular organisations.

The first moved toward orthodox 'apolitical' trade unionism, rather conservative political positions and a tendency towards bureaucracy in its internal structures.

The second adopted a more syndicalist position, distrusting any kind of officialdom (bureaucratic or otherwise) and arguing for a militant, political trade unionism that refuses as far as possible any dealings with the state.

The third tendency moved towards a position that a working class movement needs to be built on the basis of the independent trade unions, but that a working class movement cannot be equated with a trade union movement. They see the trade unions as providing the economic foundations for a movement that is political as well as economic.

They argue that the question of state power must be taken up but on the basis of a working class politics and not the politics of the nationalist petty bourgeoisie.

The content of what is meant by working class politics remains unclear; but it includes a strong commitment not to dilute trade union struggles as well as a commitment to workers themselves placing demands on the state for immediate reforms prior to whatever future day of reckoning is in store for the apartheid regime. In other words the fight for immediate reforms is not *counterposed* to the overthrow of the state.

The 'registration' debate illustrates these divergences. The apartheid state attempted to meet the growing power of the unions by making it possible for them to register under its Industrial Conciliation Act — a status previously reserved for white, coloured and Asian workers and denied to Africans.

It represented the state's attempt to draw the independent unions within the law, grant them a few concessions in



Inside a miners' compound. Photo: IDAF.

return for neutralising their political militancy and thereby, since it could not destroy them, induce them to accommodate.

The response of the independent trade unions was mixed. The more 'orthodox' trade unionists like CUSA welcomed the state's proposals with few reservations and sought registration roughly on the terms laid down by the state. The more syndicalist-inclined (like the GWU) argued that registration would mean the kiss of death for independent and democratic trade unionism and called for a boycott of any official machinery of state recognition of the unions. The more nationalist trade unionists (like those in SAAWU) also rejected what they regarded as recognition of apartheid and made an alliance with the syndicalists on a boycott platform.

FOSATU came nearer to a working class political perspective. They argued that *new* restrictions which registration threatened against independent unions — like a ban on the registration of multi-racial unions or unions which include migrant workers — should be boycotted; *old* restrictions on trade unionism to which registration makes no or little difference — like restrictions on strike and political affiliations — should continue to be fought against; and that *new rights* afforded by registration should be exploited by the independent unions and, whatever the intentions of the government, could be turned to advantage by the unions.

In practice this meant that FOSATU unions applied for registration on their own terms; that is, as non-racial unions comprising all categories of workers. It also meant that FOSATU maintained their commitment to fight for unrestricted rights of free association for black workers.

This strategy met with considerable success. The government gave in on the question of banning 'mixed' unions and migrant workers from registration. Registration allowed the unions to sidestep management excuses about refusing to recognise non-registered unions.

Control

At the same time registration de facto did not subject the unions — as some of the boycotters feared — to levels of control by the state which would stop them being militant and democratic.

The South African liberation movement has long argued about the relations between socialism and black liberation, reform and revolution. Is black liberation a separate stage, to be completed before socialism can be put on the agenda? Or is it the same thing as socialism? Is apartheid so integral to South African capitalism that the only possible successful form of struggle for black liberation is in fact class struggle for socialism? Or should there be a broad cross-class alliance against apartheid?

Can apartheid be reformed? Should the liberation movement adopt a stance of total non-cooperation and permanent confrontation?

The experience of the black workers' movement in recent years has shown in practice that many of the debates are scholastic.

The non-racial unions have fought for the most limited demands while not compromising their revolutionary aims. They have cooperated with broad cross-class organisations like the United Democratic Front on many issues, while retaining working class independence.

The relation between the different aspects of struggle is similar to what Rosa Luxemburg observed in the mass strike movement in Russia in 1905.

"But the movement on the whole does not proceed from the economic to the political struggle, nor even the reverse. Every great political mass action, after it has attained its political highest point, breaks up into a mass of economic strikes. And that applies not only to each of the great mass strikes, but also to the revolution as a whole.

With the spreading, clarifying and involution of the political struggle, the economic struggle not only does not recede, but extends, organises and becomes involved in equal measure. Between the two there is the most com-

The latest comprehensive figures on trade union strength in South Africa were published by the International Labour Organisation in 1984, giving 1983 memberships.

There were then about 888,000 unionised black workers, as against 16,000 in 1969.

There are two non-racial union federations. FOSATU had 106,000 affiliated members in 1983. CUSA had 148,000, of which 70,000 belonged to the National Union of Mineworkers.

In mid-1985 the NUM declared 150,000 members, but in early August it was reported to have withdrawn from CUSA because of CUSA's "lack of seriousness" in pursuing unity with FOSATU and other non-racial unions. (Irish Times, August 7).

There are a number of black or non-racial unions outside both FOSATU and CUSA.

The Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union had 40,000 members in 1984; the Food and Canning Workers Union 20,000 (1982); the General Workers' Union 12,000 (1984). The South African Allied Workers' Union claimed 50,000 members in 1982 but the South African Labour Bulletin estimated the real figure at 20,000.

There are two white-dominated trade union federations. The South African Confederation of Labour (126,000 affiliates in 1983) is white-only; its most prominent union is the white Mine Workers' Union, 23,000 strong.

The Trade Union Council of South Africa is the continuation of a long series of white-dominated trade union centres in South Africa. Historically these centres usually had some black affiliates, usually among coloured workers. TUCSA was established in its present form in 1954, as a whites-only organisation.

It relaxed the whites-only rule in the '70s, and in the early '80s claimed that 12% of its affiliated members were Africans organised in 'parallel' unions subordinated to white unions in the same industry. It had 446,000 affiliated members in 1983.

plete reciprocal action.

Every new onset and every fresh victory of the political struggle is transformed into a powerful impetus for the economic struggle, extending at the same time its external possibilities and intensifying the inner urge of the workers to better their position, and their desire to struggle. After every foaming wave of political action a fructifying deposit remains behind from which a thousand stalks of economic struggle shoot forth.

And conversely. The workers' condition of ceaseless economic struggle with the capitalists keeps their fighting energy alive in every political interval; it forms, so to speak, the permanent fresh reservoir of the strength of the proletarian classes, from which the political fight ever renews its strength, and at the same time leads the indefatigable economic sappers of the proletariat at all times, now here and now there, to isolated sharp conflicts, out of which political conflicts on a large scale unexpectedly explode.

In a word: the economic struggle is the transmitter from one political centre to another; the political struggle is the periodic fertilization of the soil for the economic struggle.

Cause and effect here continually change places; and thus the economic and the political factor in the period of the mass strike, now widely removed, completely separated or even mutually exclusive, as the theoretical plan would have them, merely form the two interlacing sides of the proletarian class struggle in Russia. And *their unity* is precisely the mass strike."

But if experience of struggle provides the basis for an answer to the strategic problems, it does not automatically spell that answer out and imprint it on people's minds. It does not automatically sweep away false answers, misconceptions, and the influence of middle-class politicians on the working class. Still less does it spontaneously provide solutions to all the tactical problems that arise.

To do all that requires a workers' political party with a vigorous internal life.

The non-racial trade unions, especially FOSATU, have been trying to develop working class politics. But trade unions, by their very structure, cannot substitute for political parties.

The best way forward would be a workers' party based on the trade unions. In form it could be similar to the British Labour Party, which was founded as a federation of trade unions and socialist groups and later developed an individual membership structure in addition. It should be much more democratic than the British Labour Party, and could be so, given that the non-racial unions in South Africa do not have encrusted bureaucracies like the British unions already had to a considerable extent in 1900.

They have concentrated on building up strong rank-and-file organisation, shop stewards structures and direct worker involvement. Strict accountability of leaders — who are to obtain mandates from their members for all that they do — has helped prevent the leaders from being coopted by industrial conciliation bureaucracy.

Full time union officials are paid similar rates to the workers they represent.

Politically such a workers' party could be very different from the British Labour Party, developing a programme for working class revolution rather than stodgy tinkering with the system. How successfully it did that would of course depend on the work of organised socialists and Marxists within the party.

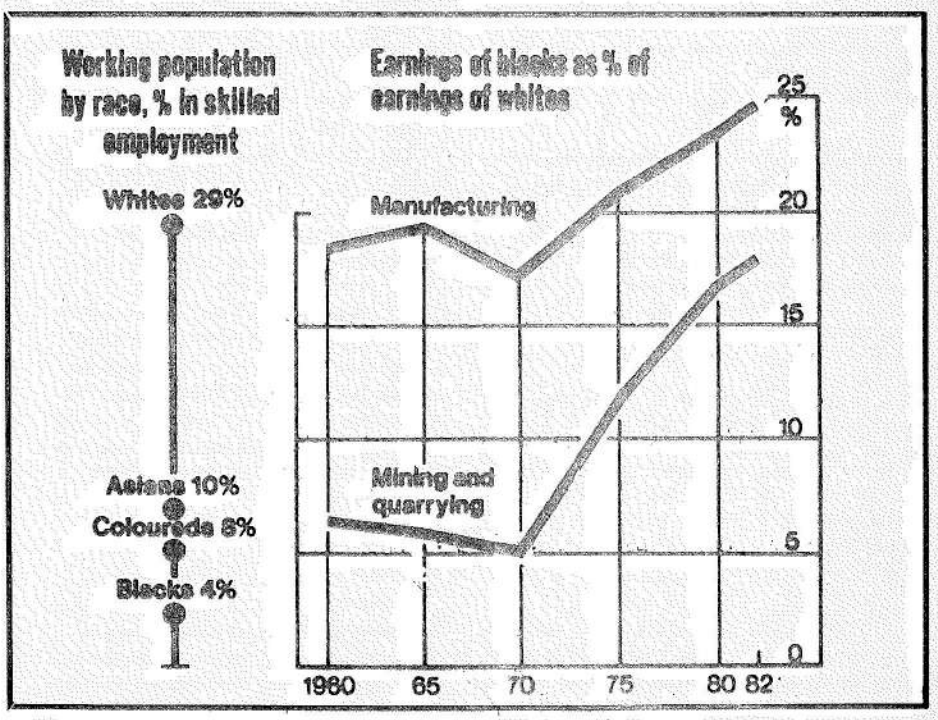
There are many difficulties with this project of a workers' party based on the trade unions, and consequently many South African trade unionists sympathetic to the general idea feel that now is not the time for it.

The unions have so far failed in repeated attempts to get some unity between their splintered forces: wouldn't this political project cause further splintering? Even in Britain, the Miners' Federation, by far the strongest union at the time, refused for several years to affiliate to the Labour Party.

The unions have had to work hard to gain semi-legality without compromising themselves: wouldn't an explicit entry into politics immediately bring down state repression?

The problems are real. But in the present turmoil the unions are being dragged into high profile politics whether they like it or not. Many of the younger shop stewards are active supporters of the UDF or the black consciousness National Forum. Unless the unions develop politics of their own, they will willy-nilly be dragged behind the UDF or the National Forum.

If the white racist regime survives the present explosion, then it will follow up with brutal repression, attempting to prevent a repetition. Even then it may not be able to crush the new trade union movement completely, but it can certainly set it back a long way. If an open working class party is not created now, there may not be another chance for some years.





A speech by FOSATU general secretary Joe Foster to the FOSATU Congress in April 1982 outlined FOSATU's political perspectives.

He rejected narrow trade unionism.

"As a trade union federation we are clearly concerned with workers and their aspirations. If we were to think in terms of our members only, we would have a very limited political role. If, however, we are thinking more widely of the working class then we have to examine very much more carefully what our political role is."

He also rejected social democracy and Stalinism as models of working class politics.

"In the capitalist economies these working class movements have power and organisation yet politically the working class is still subject to policies and practices that are clearly against their interests."

And "as the struggle of Solidarity shows . . ."

"Even the fact that a country is said to be socialist does not guarantee that workers control their own destiny. Solidarity was not struggling to restore capitalism in Poland, its struggle was to establish more democratic worker control over *their* socialist society."

The relations of a working class movement to a broad cross-class liberation movement like the ANC should, he said, be friendly but independent. In the past militant trade unions (he must have SACTU in mind) have become subordinate parts of such broad movements.

"So what has developed in South Africa is a very powerful tradition of popular or populist politics. The role of the great political movements such as the ANC and the Congress Alliance has been to mobilise the masses against the repressive minority regime.

"Where virtually all the population is voteless and oppressed by a racial minority then a great alliance of all classes is both necessary and a clear political strategy. Furthermore, building such an alliance was a great task.

"The effective political role of progressive unions and of worker activity was to provide a crucial part of any popular struggle and that was to give it its 'Worker Voice'.

Yet the real world is not just one of apartheid and anti-apartheid, but of capital and labour.

"Behind the scenes of the great battle between apartheid regime and its popular opponents the capitalist economy has flourished and capital emerges now as a powerful and different force.

"In the economy capital and labour are the major forces, yet politically the struggle is being fought elsewhere."

Moreover, from a working class point of view the ANC's politics are alien. In particular:

"To the major Western powers it has to appear as anti-racism but not as anti-capitalist. For the socialist East it has to be at least neutral in the superpower struggle and certainly it could not appear to offer a serious socialist alternative to that of those countries as the response to Solidarity illustrates. These factors must seriously affect its relationship to workers."

Foster also refers to the general experience of Third World nationalism.

"All the great and successful popular movements have had as their aim the overthrow of oppressive – most often colonial – regimes. But these movements cannot and have not in themselves been able to deal with the particular and fundamental problem of workers. Their task is to remove regimes that are regarded as illegitimate and unacceptable by the majority.

"It is, therefore, essential that workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle. This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters."

And so:

"From what has been said we believe that FOSATU must set itself the task of giving leadership and direction to the building of a working class movement.

"FOSATU as a trade union federation will clearly not constitute the working class movement nor would this place FOSATU in opposition to the wider political struggle or its major liberation movement.

"FOSATU's task will be to build the effective organisational base for workers to play a major political role as workers. Our task will be to create an identity, confidence and political presence for worker organisation."

Foster's idea seems to be more that a working class movement should operate in parallel to the ANC, safeguarding workers' specific interests, than that the workers' movement should challenge the ANC for the leadership of the whole liberation struggle. But for certain the idea of independent working class politics is developing in the new trade unions.

South African capitalism today

In 1979 the 4.5 million whites in South Africa had an average income per head of $7340, rather higher than the UK's. The 21 million Africans had an average income of $610 each, rather lower than Nicaragua's.

The 2.6 million Coloureds (mixed race) and the 0.8 million Indians are closer to the poverty of the Africans than to the wealth of the whites.

In the gold mines — the foundation of South Africa's wealth — black miners' real wages did not increase from 1915 to 1970. The gap between their wages and the white miners' increased from 9:1 in 1911 to 21:1 in 1970.

Since 1970 the black miners have narrowed the gap, but it was still 5½:1 in 1982. For the whole economy the white: African wage gap was 4:1 in 1981.

Of the value added in gold-mining, in 1973, 34% went in dividends to (white) shareholders, 25% in tax to the white-ruled state, and only 16% in wages to the black miners who produced the wealth. Of the value added in manufacturing (1970) 54% went to rent and profits, 18% to white wages, and 18% to the wages of the black majority of the workforce.

The whites own industry, finance and most of commerce, and monopolise the managerial, supervisory, and highly-skilled jobs. The blacks — Africans, Coloureds, and Indians — produce the wealth and are paid miserable wages.

Many skilled jobs used to be reserved for whites by law; some, in the gold mines, still are. A law prohibits blacks supervising whites.

The vicious economic exploitation is not the worst of it, though. South Africa has a vast, elaborate structure of explicit official racism, designed to ensure that black people live not as people but as racial categories.

Schools, hospitals, buses, cafes, bars, toilets, libraries, sports fields, are all segregated, though with some exceptions now. Cities are divided into black and white areas, with Africans bundled off into squalid townships outside the main city. Until very recently sex between people of different 'races' was a criminal offence.

Since 1950 every person in South Africa has been officially branded 'Black' (or 'Bantu'), 'Coloured', 'Asian', or 'White'.

Economically, this system is designed to ensure that black people participate fully in South African society as regards producing the wealth, but not at all as regards enjoying the benefits of that wealth.

The small Coloured and Asian populations are segregated into particular areas in the citiies. The African majority are supposed to live in reserves or bantustans, and to appear in the white areas only when required for work. That, at least, is the official theory, though it is not 100% effective.

As one minister put it in 1976: "The basis on which the Bantu is present in the white areas is to sell their labour here and for nothing else".

In laws of 1913 and 1936, some 13.7% of the land area of South Africa was set aside for 'Native Reserves' (now called bantustans). About 11.9% has actually been allocated to the ten bantustans. They form a crazy patchwork, KwaZulu bantustan alone being made up of 44 separate bits of land.

As of 1970, every African is officially a citizen of one or another bantustan, even if he or she has never been there and has no connection with the area. Between 1976 and 1981 four of the bantustans were declared 'independent', and 7.7 million blacks — most of them living outside those four areas and allocated to them



Gold

only by South African government decree — lost their South African citizenship.

Millions of Africans have been forcibly moved into the bantustans from so-called "black spots".

Production in the bantustans is minimal, mostly confined to subsistence agriculture on badly eroded and overcrowded land. Most of their income comes from workers commuting to the 'white' areas or sending remittances back from those areas. Even with that addition, the income of Africans in the bantustans is much lower than that of urban Africans — indeed, lower than the average income for most countries in Africa.

The official theory is that all African unemployed, housewives, old people and children should live in the bantustans, and only workers — without their families — should come into the white areas. Exemptions are given only to the families of the longest-established African urban workers.

It does not entirely work, because millions of Africans — up to five million now, according to the Financial Times (March 26, 1985) — come to the 'white' areas illegally, risking police harassment and deportation. But as of 1980 official figures showed 11.35 million Africans living in bantustans and 9.65 million outside.

5.4 million Africans were wage-workers. 1.6 million of them lived in the bantustans, either commuting daily (0.7 million) or working in the bantustans (0.9 million). 1.05 million were migrants from the bantustans working in 'white' areas; 0.25 million were migrants from other countries (mostly gold-miners). 2.5 million were resident and working outside the bantustans.

Every African over the age of 16 outside the bantustands must carry a pass book, containing not only their address and resident permit but also details of their employer. If they are breaking apartheid restrictions in any way, or are unemployed ('idle Bantu'), they can be jailed or sent to the bantustan. Between 1948 and 1981 there were over 12.5 million arrests or prosecutions under the Pass Laws.

To further enforce the migrant labour system, the regime deliberately restricts the construction of family housing in the black townships outside the bantustands. Houses are massively overcrowded. In Soweto people live on average five to a room. Many workers, especially gold-miners, are housed in jail-like single-sex hostels.

The education and health systems are geared to the same philosophy. Both are racially segregated. Black education is deliberately limited to maintain the whites' monopoly of highly-qualified jobs. 5½ times as much is spent per head on education for whites as for Africans, and 48% of Africans over the age of 15 were illiterate in the early '80s — a figure similar to Zaire or Uganda.

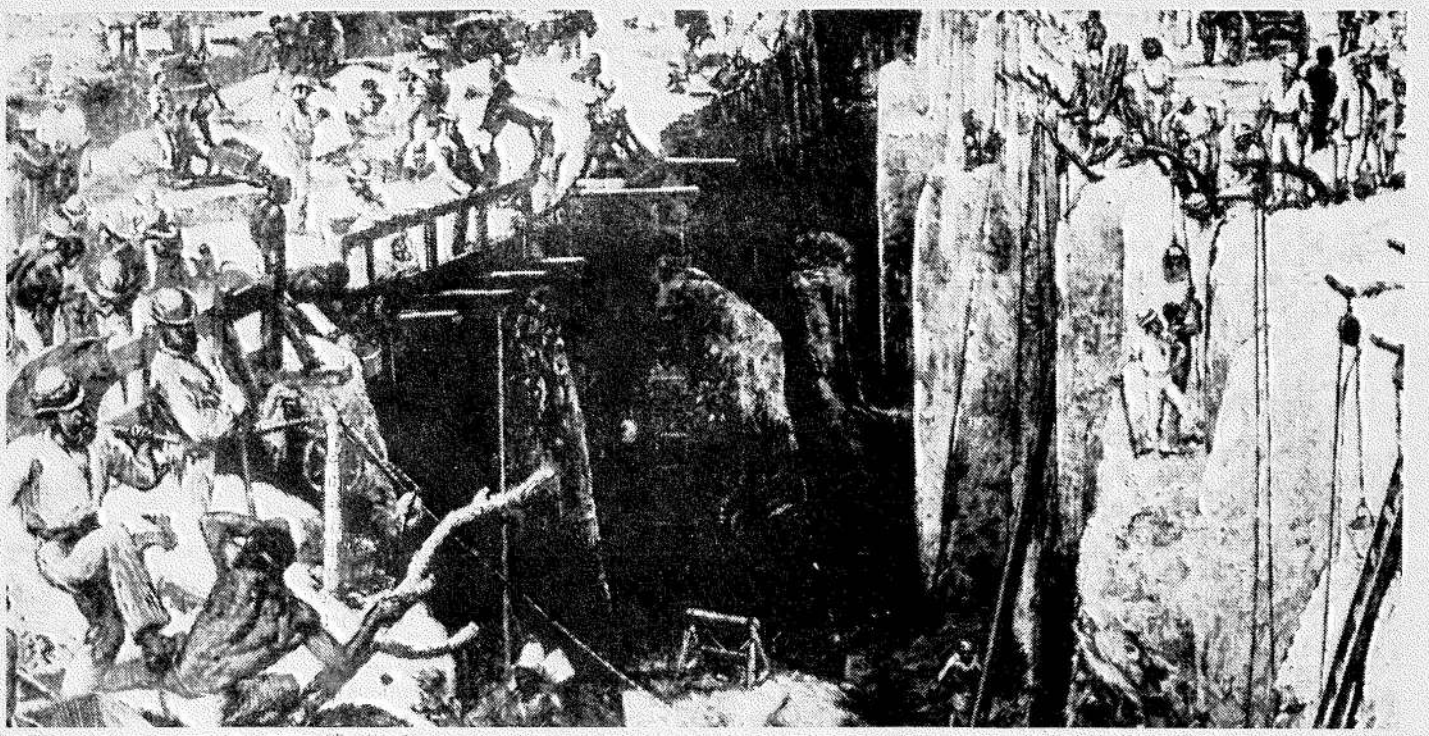
There are six times as many hospital beds per head for whites as for blacks. Infant mortality for whites is at West European levels; for Africans, at a level similar to India and higher than Kenya.

50,000 African childen die of hunger each year.

Employers are utterly reckless of black workers' safety. The death rate among black miners is six times as high as among miners in the UK.

To sustain this structure of injustice, the regime is brutally undemocratic. Only the whites, 15.5% of the population, can vote. (Coloureds and Indians were offered powerless elected assemblies last year, but most boycotted the polls). The government has wide powers to declare organisations illegal (as it has done with the ANC, the South African Communist Party, many black consciousness organisations, and most recently the black students' union COSAS); to 'ban' individuals (i.e. put them effectively under house arrest, like Winnie Mandela); to ban newspapers and meetings; and to detain people without charge.

Police torture of prisoners is common. At least 57 political detainees died in detention in 1963-83, Steve Biko and Neil Aggett only being the best-known. There were 161 other deaths (not of political detainees) in police custody in 1978 alone. Between 1974 and 1979 946 people were killed by police 'in the execution of their duties', in addition to maybe 1000 killed by police in the uprisings of 1976-7.



Diamond mining in the 1870s

From diamonds to apartheid

South Africa started on the road to its present system in 1867, when diamonds were discovered at what is now Kimberley.

Up to then the area had been unimportant in the world economy. Britain held the Cape area and Natal (on the eastern coast) for strategic reasons — the Cape commanded the route to India and Australia.

These colonies were populated by Dutch settlers — Afrikaners, they called themselves — who had established themselves there between 1652 and British conquest in 1806; 'Coloureds', mixed-race people and Indonesians who had been made slaves by the Dutch; and, from 1860, Indian labourers brought in by Britain to work on sugar plantations in Natal.

Further inland, two independent republics — Transvaal and the Orange Free State — were ruled by Dutch people who had moved inland on the Great Trek of 1836 after Britain abolished slavery on the Cape in 1834.

The whole area had about 260,000 whites, amidst maybe a couple of million Africans. The farmers (or Boers) in the Afrikaner republics had made the Africans feudal-type tenants or sharecroppers. But in large areas the Africans still retained their independence.

Then came the diamond rush. By 1871 there were over 10,000 whites at Kimberley, and 30,000 black labourers. That year Britain annexed the area round Kimberley. In 1872 the black claimholders were excluded from the diamond mines, by demand of the whites, and the first pass system for black labour was started.

In 1875 the 'compound' system for black labour was first introduced, and in 1884 the De Beers company started using black convict labour.

By 1880 three-quarters of the white former claimholders had become salaried overseers, and by 1888 De Beers had a complete monopoly of the mines.

Rigorous

The system of controlling black labour was made rigorous. "The compound was an enclosure surrounded by a high corrugated iron fence and covered by wire netting. The men lived, twenty to a room, in huts or iron cabins built against the fence.

"They went to work along a tunnel, bought food and clothing from the company's stores...all within the compound" (1).

Before then Africans had been strip-searched at the end of each shift to make sure they were not stealing diamonds. They had struck against this in 1887. Under the compound system they were strip-searched and made to vomit at the end of their contract.

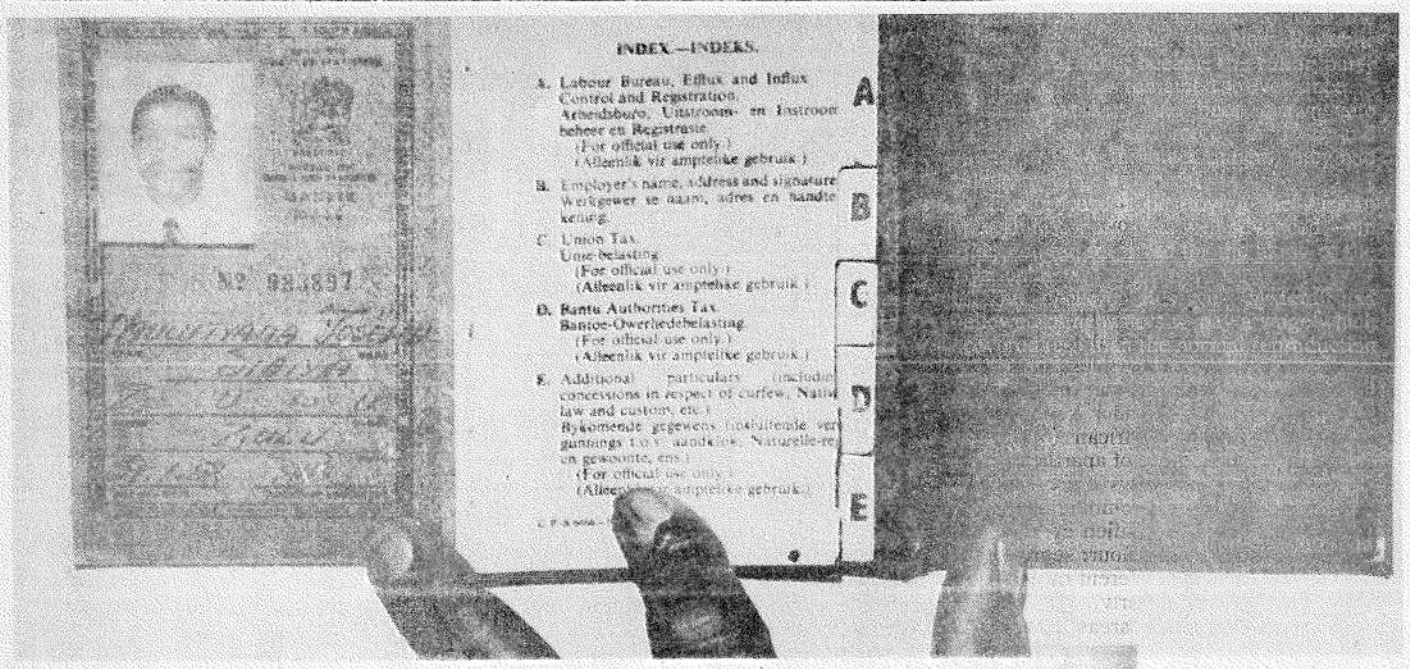
The diamond mines had already created South Africa's "first industrial colour bar...and for the first time the systematic disciplining of a large black labour force by pass laws, searching and compounding" (2).

The system also required the conquest of African areas until then independent. Africans in those areas were driven off the land and into the diamond mines by forcing them to pay taxes in cash.

Then from the 1890s the system was repeated in the Transvaal on a much bigger scale.

Gold was first discovered in 1870. The Witwatersrand Main Reef — a vast layer of gold-bearing rock, whose resources are still practically limitless — was discovered

1652: First Dutch settlement on the Cape.
1806: Britain takes the Cape.
1836: Great Trek inland by the Dutch (Afrikaners), after Britain outlaws slavery.
1867: Diamonds discovered near Kimberley.
1871-94: Big new areas annexed by Britain.
1886: Transvaal gold rush starts.
1899-1902: Anglo-Boer War.
1910: Union of South Africa formed.
1913: Native Land Act (beginning of bantustan system).
1922: Rand Revolt — white miners strike and fight troops and police in defence of colour bar.
1924: Afrikaner-Nationalist/Labour coalition government elected. Introduces measures to build up industry and protect white labour.
1946: Black miners' strike.
1948: Nationalist government elected. Imposes a full dogmatic system of apartheid.
1960: Sharpeville massacre. 87 Africans on pass law protest shot dead.



The hated pass books. Photo: IDAF.

in 1886. Deep mining for gold started from the early 1890's.

To this day South Africa produces nearly half the world's gold (620 out of 1420 tonnes in 1980), and gold is 45% of its exports (1983).

Witwatersrand has vast quantities, but of low quality ore. The gold mines required, and require, large initial capital investments to drill deep shafts, and great amounts of labour to process great masses of ore.

The technique has changed little since the earliest days. The gold mines today employ a huge workforce — 500,000 to 600,000 — and produce little more gold per worker than at the start of the century. Labour costs were 60% of total costs in the first decades, and are 40% now.

But the gold capitalists had great advantages. They had an unlimited market — for gold is the one commodity that can never be unsaleable — at a fixed sterling price. So long as they could reduce costs sufficiently, they had a guaranteed fortune.

Foreign capital poured in. By 1913 £370 million of British capital was invested in South Africa. 60% of the capital raised for the gold mines in 1887-1934 was foreign.

The capitalists needed two things: skilled mining labour to drill the shafts, which they imported mainly from Britain; and masses of cheap unskilled African labour.

Getting that cheap labour was not easy. In the early 1890s black miners were able to get wages perhaps twice as high in real terms as their successors in 1970.

A pass system was started from 1892. New taxes were imposed on African peasants in South Africa. In return for a fee to the Portuguese colonial government, Mozambique supplied workers (over half the workforce by 1890; the industry has depended heavily on foreign labour ever since, with 80% of black miners in 1973 being from outside South Africa, and 40% today).

Still the capitalists were not satisfied. By 1899 they needed 97,000 workers. The Boer republic, though fervently and dogmatically racist, was not able to organise the necessary control over African labour. It drew heavy taxes from the mineowners and refused all new settlers — uitlanders — the vote.

In 1899 Britain went to war against the Boer republics — partly pulled into it by the mineowners, partly worried that a booming Transvaal under Afrikaner control would take the Cape and Natal out of the British Empire. After desperate guerilla resistance by the Boers — against which the British pioneered the use of concentration camps — Britain triumphed.

"The war had been fought to make the Transvaal safe for the Corner House" (the headquarters of the biggest mining company) (3).

Now pass laws were tightned. The Native Locations Act of 1904 segregated Africans. Wages were pushed down. The mineowners established a consortium for joint recruitment of labour (which still exists). From 1904, some 50,000 Chinese were brought to the mines on short-term contracts.

A few people — notably the future Labour leader Frederic Creswell — demanded mass immigration of white labour, to run the mines on an all-white basis. The High Commissioner, Milner, dissented. "We do not want a white proletariat in this country".

Caste

South Africa would be neither a new Australia or Canada — with the native people wiped out — nor a new India, with only a small white ruling caste. It would be something in between.

The mines were run on a basis of approximately one white miner to ten blacks. (Today it is 1:20 or 1:25).

The Chinese experiment was soon abandoned, but the new Union of South Africa, set up as a British dominion in 1910, took steps to solve the mineowners' labour problem. The 1913 Native Land Act restricted African peasants to a small proportion of South Africa's land (basically the present-day bantustans). The 1911 Mines and Works Act introduced a colour bar for skilled jobs in the mines. A range of laws "laid down the broad legal framework for present-day apartheid South Africa" (4).

The African peasants and workers resisted. There was a big black miners' strike over pay in 1920. The white miners clashed with the mineowners, too. In 1922 they struck. The strike culminated in armed fighting with police and troops in which over 200 people were killed. Yet its demand was to maintain the colour bar on semi-skilled jobs in the mines, in opposition to the mineowners' intention to relax it.

White workers felt at risk. The Boer peasant economy had begun to break up, and Afrikaners were streaming into the cities. By 1918 75% of the white gold-miners were Afrikaners. Many were not skilled men like the British immigrants, but at best semi-skilled.

In 1924 these "poor whites" put into power a coalition government of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party and the (white, mostly British) Labour Party. The government, under Westminster supervision, tackled the class and Anglo/Afrikaner conflicts within the white community at the expense of the blacks.

Protectionist tariffs were introduced to help home industry. The state took a leading role: a state-owned iron and steel corporation was set up in 1928. (Today 58% of South Africa's fixed capital stock is state-owned). Whites were given preference for jobs in the state sector. Job preference laws for white workers were introduced, to counterbalance the mineowners' victory in 1922. An industrial bargaining system was set up for whites only. Legal barriers restricted Africans from moving to the cities.

As manufacturing industry began to grow, whites had a large percentage of the jobs — 45% in 1932-3.

But the world slump in 1929-32 caused new unemployment, both black and white, and generated a split in the Nationalist Party. One wing joined the more British-oriented South Africa party (to form the United Party, today the New Republic Party). The other became the ruling party in 1948, and has remained so ever since.

Black workers had been drawn into industry more and more. In 1942 and again in 1946 (the black miners) they had struck in large numbers.

The process of destroying the African peasant economy was well advanced — in fact, too far advanced for the liking of the Nationalists.

The 'Native Reserve' system had allowed mineowners to pay a wage which covered less than the normal reproduction

of labour power, relying on the peasant economy of the black miner's family in the reserve to cover the rest. A collapse of that system would inevitably mean a rise of wages and also an integration, on whatever bad terms, of Africans into the urban economy.

The Nationalists did not want that. They set out to keep the African population as separate from the white areas as was consistent with the Africans providing the labour to produce the wealth of those areas.

Fervent nationalism, racism and cold war ideology helped them do it. The 1946 black miners' strike had been defeated; black trade unions were effectively outlawed in 1953. The white labour movement "buckled and broke" under Nationalist pressure, and excluded Africans (5).

The whole doctrinal system of apartheid was installed. In 1949-50 laws enforced racial segregation in trains; prohibited sex between different races; classified everyone in South Africa by skin colour; segregated residential areas for different races; and banned the Communist Party.

"The Bantu in the urban areas", the 1948 Nationalist manifesto said, "should be regarded as migratory citizens not entitled to political or social rights equal to those of whites".

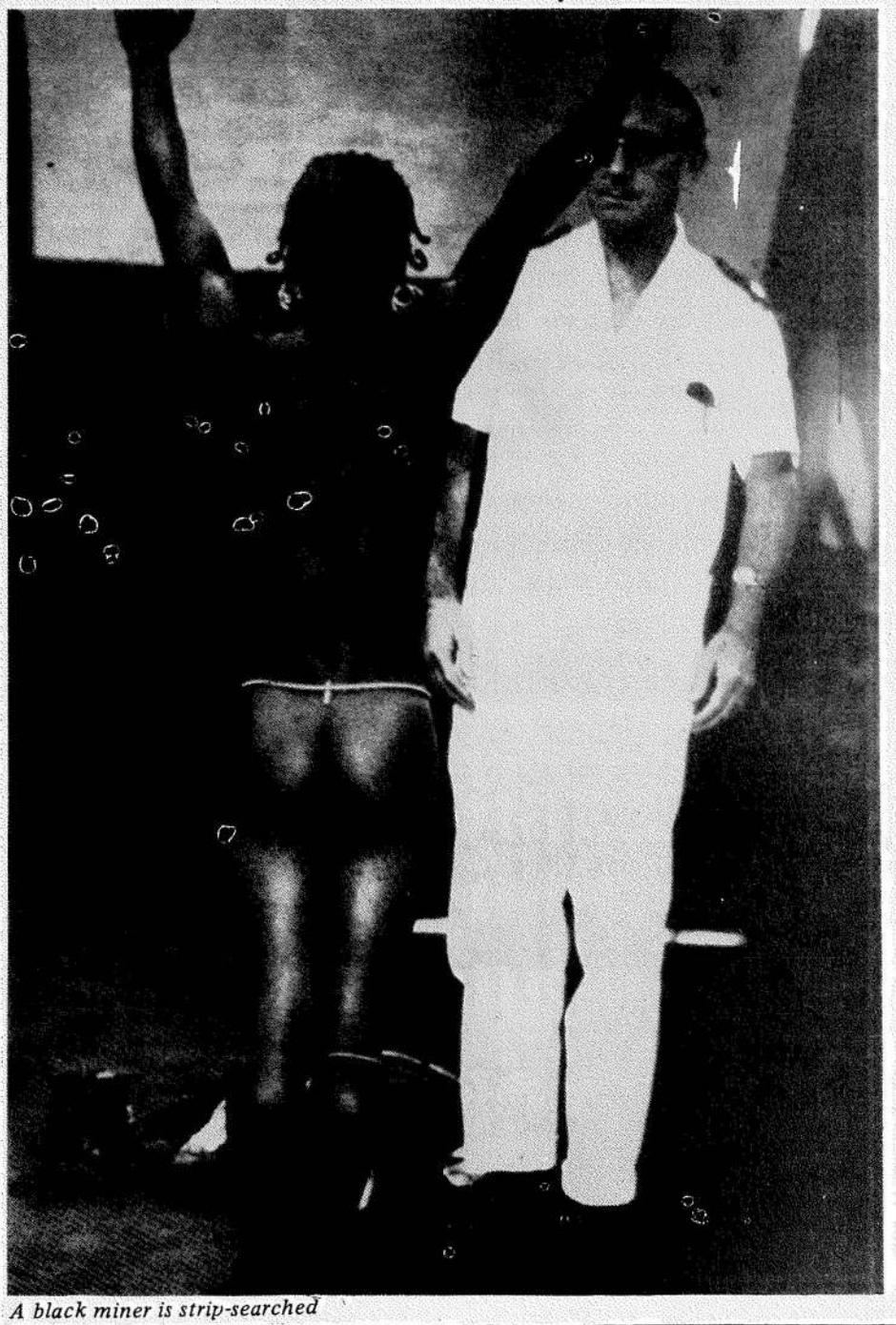
And, on its own terms, the system worked. Waves of protest by the black population were eventually broken after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 and the Rivonia Treason Trial of 1963 (at which Nelson Mandela was sentenced). In the 1960s South African manufacturing industry grew very fast. By 1979 it was 25% of national output; it had only been 4% in 1911.

Crises

Many Afrikaners made their way into the South African big business class, previously almost entirely English-speaking.

South Africa's profit rates were higher than elsewhere, and foreign capital poured in.

Since the late 1970s, however, the South African economy has run into crises. The political effects of national liberation victories elsewhere and a resurgent black workers' movement in South Africa are not the only reasons for this.



A black miner is strip-searched

Productivity is very low in South African industry. In gold-mining it has stagnated. In manufacturing it rose only 1.4% per year between 1919 and 1976.

The reason is plain: for increased productivity you need healthy, well-educated workers. Brute repression can turn South Africa's black workers into half-starved helots and force them to labour, but it cannot get high productivity in modern industry.

In gold this problem matters relatively little, especially with the huge rise of dollar gold prices after 1971. Even so, the mineowners found it advisable to increase black miners' pay about 3½-fold in real terms between 1970 and 1978.

In manufacturing it matters much more. Under pressure from capitalists the government has allowed some liberalisation. In 1979, for example, there were *no* African apprentices in metal engineering. By 1982 there were 390.

Siemens increased the percentage of skilled and semi-skilled among its African workers from 2.4% in 1966 to 26% in 1980. Not out of any concern for justice — the same firm summarily sacked over 1000 black workers in July for going on strike — but out of self-interest.

The system also faces problems from the other end. The bantustan economies are collapsing. No government other than South Africa itself recognises the four 'independent' bantustans as independent. Even the pliant Chief Buthelezi says he would oppose by force any attempt to declare his KwaZulu bantustan independent. No number of police can stop millions of Africans — maybe five million now — escaping from these barren hellholes illegally in order to seek work. The scheme of maintaining islands of pre-capitalist economy for the blacks within a dynamic advanced capitalist economy for whites is not viable.

A large section of South Africa's richest capitalists support the Progressive Federal Party, a 1950s split-off from the New Republic Party.

The PFP wants:

*Abolition of pass laws and apartheid.

*One person, one vote.

*A federal system giving local autonomy to white or black areas.

*Compulsory proportional representation of all parties in the federal government.

*Veto powers for a 15% minority in the federal assembly.

As it happens, the whites in South Africa are just over 15%.

Gavin Relly, chair of the giant Anglo-American Corporation, and a business group, the Urban Foundation, have made similar proposals. The PFP also works closely with Chief Buthelezi.

What these people want is controlled, limited reform from the top, guaranteed not to hurt the interests of any but the poorest whites. In any confrontation between black workers and the state, they will be on the side of the state; in any quiet period they will not be so dissatisfied with the status quo as to want to modify it more than slightly.

Footnotes.

1. J&R Simons, 'Class and colour in South Africa', p.42.

2. G. Wheatcroft, 'The Randlords'.

3. Wheatcroft.

4. D. Innes, 'Anglo-American and the Rise of Modern South Africa'.

5. Simons, p.594-8.

Imperialism and capitalist development

In this extract from her book 'The Accumulation of Capital', the Polish-German Marxist Rosa Luxemburg — murdered by counter-revolutionary armed forces under a Social-Democratic government in 1919 — analysed British imperialism in South Africa.

In the Cape Colony and the Boer Republics, pure peasant economy prevailed until the sixties of the last century. For a long time the Boers had led the life of animal-tending nomads; they had killed off or driven out the Hottentots and Kaffirs with a will in order to deprive them of their most valuable pastures. In the eighteenth century they were given invaluable assistance by the plague, imported by ships of the East India Compnay, which frequently did away with entire Hottentot tribes whose lands then fell to the Dutch immigrants.

When the Boers spread further East, they came in conflict with the Bantu tribes and initiated the long period of the terrible Kaffir wars. These god-fearing Dutchmen regarded themselves as the Chosen People and took no small pride in their old-fashioned Puritan morals and their intimate knowledge of the Old Testament; yet, not content with robbing the natives of their land, they built their peasant economy like parasites on the backs of the Negroes, compelling them to do slave-labour for them and corrupting and enervating them deliberately and systematically. Liquor played such an important part in this process, that the prohibition of spirits in the Cape Colony could not be carried through by the English government because of Puritan opposition.

There were no railways until 1859, and Boer economy in general and on the whole remained patriarchal and based on natural economy until the sixties. But their patriarchal attitude did not deter the Boers from extreme brutality and harshness. It is well known that Livingstone complained much more about the Boers than about the Kaffirs.

The Boers considered the Negroes an object, destined by God and Nature to slave from them, and as such an indispensable foundation of their peasant economy. So much so that their answer to the abolition of slavery in the English colonies in 1836 was the 'Great Trek', although there the owners had been compensated with £3,000,000.

By way of the Orange River and Vaal, the Boers emigrated from the Cape Colony and in the process they drove the Matabele to the North, across the Limpopo, setting them against the Makalakas. Just as the American farmer had driven the Red Indian West before him under the impact of capitalist economy, so the Boer drove the Negro to the North.

The 'Free Republics' between the Orange River and the Limpopo thus were created as a protest against the designs of the English bourgeoisie on the sacred right of slavery. The tiny peasant republics were in constant guerilla warfare against the Bantu Negroes.

And it was on the backs of the Negroes that the battle between the Boers and the English government, which went on for decades, was fought. The Negro question, i.e. the emancipation of the Negroes, ostensibly aimed at by the English bourgeoisie, served as a pretext for the conflict between England and the republics. In fact, peasant economy and great capitalist colonial policy were here competing for the Hottentots and Kaffirs, that is to say for their land and their labour power.

Both competitors had precisely the same aim: to subject, expel or destroy the coloured peoples, to appropriate their land and press them into service by the abolition of their social organisations. Only their methods of exploitation were fundamentally different.

While the Boers stood for out-dated slavery on a petty scale, on which their patriarchal peasant economy was founded, the British bourgeoisie represented modern large-scale capitalist exploitation of the land and the natives. The Constitution of the Transvaal (South African) Republic declared with crude prejudice: 'The People shall not permit any equality of coloured persons with white inhabitants, neither in the Church nor in the State'.

In the Orange Free State and in the Transvaal no Negro was allowed to own land, to travel without papers or to walk abroad after sunset. Bryce tells us of a case where a farmer, an Englishman as it happened, in the Eastern Cape Colony had flogged his Kaffir slave to death. When he was acquitted in open court, his neighbours escorted him home to the strains of music. The white man frequently maltreated his free native labourers after they had done their work — to such an extent that they would take to flight, thus saving the master their wages.

The British government employed precisely the opposite tactics. For a long time it appeared as protector of the natives; flattering the chieftains in particular, it supported their authority and tried to make them claim a right of disposal over their land.

Wherever it was possible, it gave them ownership of tribal land, according to well-tried methods, although this flew in the face of tradition and of the actual social organisation of the Negroes. All tribes in fact held their land communally, and even the most cruel and despotic rulers such as the Matabele Chieftain Lobengula merely had the right as well as the duty to allot every family a piece of land which they could only retain so long as they cultivated it.

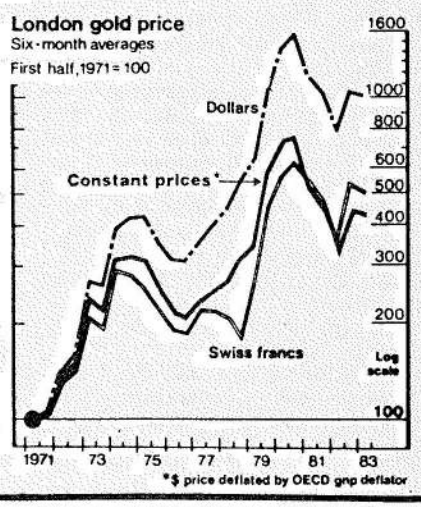
The ultimate purpose of the British government was clear: long in advance it was preparing for land robbery on a grand scale, using the native chieftains themselves as tools. But in the beginning it was content with the 'pacification' of the Negroes by extensive military actions. Up to 1879 were fought nine bloody Kaffir wars to break the resistance of the Bantus.

British capital revealed its real intentions only after two important events had taken place: the discovery of the Kimberley diamond fields in 1869-70, and the discovery of the gold mines in the Transvaal in 1882-5, which initiated a new epoch in the history of South Africa.

Then the British South Africa Company, that is to say Cecil Rhodes, went into action.

Public opinion in England rapidly swung over, and the greed for the treas-

How gold prices have changed





Rosa Luxemburg

ures of South Africa urged the British government on to drastic measures. South Africa was suddenly flooded with immigrants who had hitherto only appeared in small numbers — immigration have been deflected to the United States. But with the discovery of the diamond and gold fields, the numbers of white people in the South African colonies grew by leaps and bounds: between 1885 and 1895, 100,000 British had immigrated into Witwatersrand alone.

The modest peasant economy was forthwith pushed into the background — the mines, and thus the mining capital, coming to the fore. The policy of the British government veered round abruptly.

Great Britain had recognised the Boer Republics by the Sand River Agreement and the Treaty of Bloemfontein in the fifties. Now her political might advanced upon the tiny republics from every side, occupying all neighbouring districts and cutting off all possibility of expansion.

At the same time the Negroes, no longer protected favourites, were sacrificed. British capital was steadily forging ahead.

In 1868, Britian took over the rule of Basutoland — only, of course, because the natives had 'repeatedly implored' her to do so. In 1871, the Witwatersrand diamond fields, or West Griqualand, were seized from the Orange Free State and turned into a Crown Colony. In 1879, Zululand was subjected, later to become part of the Natal Colony; in 1885 followed the subjection of Bechuanaland, to be joined to the Cape Conoly. In 1888 Britain took over Matabele and Mashonaland, and in 1889 the British South Africa Company was given a Charter for both these districts, again, of course, only to oblige the natives and at their request. Between 1884 and 1887, Britain annexed St. Lucia Bay and the entire East Coast as far as the Portuguese possessions. In 1894 she subjected Tongaland.

With their last strength, the Matabele and Mashona fought one more desperate battle, but the Company, with Rhodes at the head, first liquidated the rising in blood and at once proceeded to the well-tried measure for civilising and pacifying the natives: two large railways were built in the rebellious district.

The Boer Republics were feeling increasingly uncomfortable in this sudden stranglehold, and their internal affairs as well were becoming completely disorganised. The overwhelming influx of immigrants and the rising tides of the frenzied new capitalist economy now threatened to burst the barriers of the small peasant states.

There was indeed a blatant conflict between agricultural and political peasant economy on the one hand, and the demands and requirements of the accumulation of capital on the other. In all respects, the republics were quite unable to cope with these new problems.

The constant danger from the Kaffirs, no doubt regarded favourably by the British, the unwieldy primitive administration, the gradual corruption of the *volksraad* in which the great capitalists got their way by bribery, lack of a police force to keep the undisciplined crowds of adventurers in some semblance of order, the absence of labour legislation for regulating and securing the exploitation of the Negroes in the mines, lack of water supplies and transport to provide for the colony of 100,000 immigrants that had suddenly sprung up, high protective tariffs which increased the cost of labour for the capitalists, and high frieghts for coal — all these factors combined towards the sudden and stunning bankruptcy of the peasant republics.

They tried obstinately and unimaginatively, to defend themselves against the sudden eruption of capitalism which engulfed them, with an incredibly crude measure, such as only a stubborn and hide-bound peasant brain could have devised: they denied all civic rights to the *uitlanders* who outnumbered them by far and who stood for capital, power and the trend of the time. In those critical times it was an ill-omened trick.

The mismanagement of the peasant republics caused a considerable reduction of dividends, on no account to be put up with. Mining capital had come to the end of its tether. The British South Africa Company built railroads, put down the Kaffirs, organised revolts of the *uitlanders* and finally provoked the Boer War. The bell had tolled for peasant economy.

In the United States, the economic revolution had begun with a war, in South Africa was put the period to this chapter. Yet in both instances, the outcome was the same: capital triumphed over the small peasant economy which had in its turn come into being on the ruins of natural economy, represented by the natives' primitive organisations.

The domination of capital was a foregone conclusion, and it was just as hopeless for the Boer Republics to resist as it had been for the American farmer. Capital officially took over the reins in the new South African Union which replaced the small peasant republics by a great modern state, as envisaged by Cecil Rhodes' imperialist programme. The new conflict between capital and labour had superseded the old one between British and Dutch.

One million white exploiters of both nations sealed their touching fraternal alliance within the Union with the civil and political disfranchisement of five million coloured workers. Not only the Negroes of the Boer Republics came away empty-handed, but the natives of the Cape Colony, whom the British government had at one time granted political equality, were also deprived of some of their rights.

And this noble work, culminating under the imperialist policy of the Conservatives in open oppression, was actually to be finished by the Liberal Party itself, amid frenzied applause from the 'liberal cretins of Europe' who with sentimental pride took as proof of the still continuing creative vigour and greatness of English liberalism the fact that Britain had granted complete self-government and freedom to a handful of whites in South Africa.



White overseer and black workers

The white working class

Some South African capitalists want a modification in the system, so long as the black workers will keep quiet and not demand too much. The white workers, however, are in their great majority supporters of apartheid. How did this come about?

The early white working class was often militant. In 1883 white diamond miners struck against strip searches for stolen diamonds. Yet they made no attempt at common cause with the black miners who were to strike on the same issue four years later. And when told that London dockers had agreed to such searches, they replied: "Neither can overseers rightly be compared with dock labourers. Actually dock labourers occupy the position of our Kaffirs" (Africans).

From the start the white workers were usually overseers and supervisors, paid maybe ten times as much as the black workers. In the early days of gold mining, until after World War 1, the white miners were like sub-contractors. The black workers were paid flat rates; the whites were paid piece rates according to the work done by the blacks under their supervision.

Many of the white trade unionists saw the defence of the colour bar as a defence of organised labour against unorganised, low-paid labour — and, in particular, a defence of their own jobs. The best socialists among them got only as far as saying that race questions were a diversion and an irrelevance, and the only real issue was capitalists versus workers, white or black.

During the Rand Revolt of 1922 these attitudes were expressed in the slogan, 'Workers of the World Fight and Unite for a White South Africa'. White socialists saw this as defending 'civilised standards'.

Fighting

Some of the strikers sang the Red Flag as they were sent to the gallows for their part in the fighting with government forces. Yet at the start of the dispute the strikers had been encouraged by the police to set up armed squads on the understanding that they would suppress any unrest among the black miners.

After 1917, under the impact of the Bolshevik revolution and Bolshevik theory, a small minority of white workers broke from racism and founded the Communist Party of South Africa. The Russian Revolution, and especially the USSR's treatment of its dark-skinned peoples, also inspired many black South Africans; the first sizeable black union in South Africa, the Industrial and Commercial Union, was formed in 1919.

The CP, at first exclusively white in membership, moved slowly towards a new outlook.

In 1922 it justified the slogan 'Workers of the World Unite for a White South Africa'; in 1924 it supported the Nationalist-Labour alliance, saying that this was an

On her tour of Africa Glenys Kinnock met a black student from South Africa studying English, and was reported as saying that she hoped that English and not Afrikaans would be spoken in a democratic South Africa.

Apartheid is often blamed exclusively on the Afrikaners (60% of white South Africans) as if the English-speaking 40% were innocent.

In fact the first version of the apartheid system of labour control was introduced in the diamond mines under British rule. A similar system was extended and regularised for the whole of South Africa in the years after Britain won the Boer War.

The mineowners who pioneered South African capitalism were overwhelmingly British-based, and they paid 75% of their dividends to British shareholders.

To identify hostility to apartheid with hostility to Afrikaans is doubly stupid because many South African coloureds, as well as whites, are Afrikaans-speaking.

'anti-imperialist united front'!

But by 1928 it finally worked its way through to the slogan of a black republic (later defended by Trotsky in a letter of 1932 to South African Trotskyists).

The CP was winning substantial support among black workers, and though small held leading positions in the white trade unions.

By now Stalinism ruled in Moscow. Along with the 'black republic' slogan, the CP was frogmarched into a 'two-stage' theory of revolution. And in 1931 its main leaders were purged, to be replaced by loyal Stalinists.

Cancer

Better things might have been possible without the cancer of Stalinism. In any case, the CP — along with Trotskyists and other leftists — registered some significant achievements in non-racial trade unionism in the 1930s.

According to the historians Jack and Ray Simons, "New industrial laws, the 'civilised' labour policy, and the Labour Party's presence in the coalition government (after 1924) marked (the skilled white worker's) absorption in the ruling elite. The position of the factory operative and unskilled white worker was still in





Luxury for the few, poverty for the majority

doubt. Left-wing trade unions and Afrikaner nationalism would compete for their allegiance in the following two decades".

Afrikaner nationalism won. After 1948 the white labour movement rapidly abandoned any sort of independent role.

Now the white workers are firmly linked to the established order by racist pay differentials giving them wages four or times blacks'.

Unequivocally

Some whites do side unequivocally with the oppressed blacks. White students and ex-students have helped the new non-racial unions and sometimes serve them as officials.

Some white unions, also, have shifted a bit. The hard-line racist SACOL has lost affiliates, and some white-dominated unions have left TUCSA in favour of cooperating more closely with the non-racial unions.

But their vast privileges keep most white workers firmly on the side of the regime. An increasing number have reacted to the rising black revolt by leaving South Africa.

Despite everything they have done, the whites should have equal rights; and indeed, documents like the Freedom Charter recognise that. The revolution will be easier and less bloody, the more whites it can win over or at least render neutral; and the education and skills of many whites will be valuable to a new South Africa or Azania.

Separate self-government or a federal system to accommodate the whites are scarcely possible: in every big city and every area except the bantustans, blacks and whites are closely mixed together. Trying to separate out African areas in Natal, the South African government arrived at 44 separate bits for KwaZulu bantustan, with another 144 "black spots" from which Africans were due to be deported into the bantustan!

Paralleled

Although some of the South African whites' attitudes are paralleled by the Israeli Jews and the Northern Ireland Protestants, as a community they are not similar. The South African whites are not a more or less complete and autonomous community, embracing all classes, but a capitalist class, a middle class, and a thin labour aristocracy, all resting on top of a black working class.

There can be no justice in South Africa unless the whites accept equality. And the blacks can't, won't and should not be asked to wait until the whites accept equality voluntarily rather than having it forced on them.



Still no sweat from the white overseer. Photo: IDAF.



Photo: IDAF

Women in revolt

White women in South Africa are unequal. Abortion is illegal in all but very restricted circumstances. Relatively few of them have waged jobs; having black domestic servants, many of them are relegated to a parasitic existence.

But an infinitely greater burden of sexual oppression is suffered by the black women who are domestic servants for the white women.

Indian women in South Africa have special problems because of the religious and cultural traditions of their community which mean that very few of them indeed go out to get waged jobs. African women are the hardest-hit victims of the whole migrant labour system.

That system relies on and exploits the family structure in its most stripped-down, crudely economic form. The African man appears in the white city, unencumbered, as and when required as a worker; meanwhile the African woman stays on the bantustan, working the land to gain a subsistence, bringing up the next generation of workers, and maintaining the male worker in periods when the capitalist does not need him.

Flawed

Love and companionship, however flawed in the normal capitalist family, are not provided for at all here. The woman in the family is an economic reservoir and shock-absorber for capital, and nothing more. The male worker is legally forbidden to take his wife and children with him when he goes to work in the white areas.

Most African women, therefore, live in the bantustans. (Officially, five million out of eight million, though a lot of women are outside the bantustans illegally).

The bantustan women suffer desperate, grinding poverty, relieved only by remittances from men working in white areas, as and when those remittances arrive.

And worse. The system in the bantustans, ruled by chiefs under an addled version of African traditions imposed by the white government, is very male-dominated. Almost all women in the bantustands have the same legal status as children, utterly dependent on their fathers or husbands. One of the first measures of Transkei when it became 'independent' was to legalise polygamy. When women go outside the bantustans, their pass books have to include a permit from their father or husband.

Bophuthatswana bantustan adds an 'up-to-date' element to this primeval oppression. A £50 million resort complex includes gambling, sports, and cinemas, and lots of black women prostitutes for wealthy whites driving across the border from South Africa.

The migrant-labour/bantustan system

in its dogmatic form is unliveable, and in fact to a substantial degree it has broken down. Family structures have shattered: only 23% of African women are married, as against 46% of white women, and 60% of children in Soweto are born out of marriage.

Millions of women enter the white areas illegally to find work. They find forms of oppression perhaps less bleak than on the bantustans, but scarcely less severe.

A decreasing but still large proportion of African women work as domestic servants for white women. (One quarter of all women employed in 1980 — black and white — were domestic servants). They suffer not only long hours, low pay, and personal humiliation, but also a law forbidding them to live with their husbands even if the employer agrees.

Underestimate

Increasing numbers of women have jobs in industry. In 1946 African women were only 1.8% of all production workers in South Africa. Now in the textile industry they are 30% of the workforce (1981).

Between 1973 and 1981 the proportion of women in the black workforce increased from 14 to 22%. (These official figures probably underestimate the situation because of illegal workers). Since the mid-1970s black women have also begun to get jobs like nurses, teachers, cashiers, sales clerks, etc.

Even there, however, their wages are lower than men's. And generally maternity agreements for black women are so poor that women have to try to conceal pregnancies from the employers and to work right through them.

In the black townships women find terrible conditions. Housing is overcrowded (an average of five people per room in Soweto). The brutalising, depressing conditions of black male workers often drive them to take it out on women. Wife-battering is common; rapes have been estimated to run at 800 per day in South Africa. Rape of a white woman by a black man can bring the man a death sentence, but the police regard rape of a black woman as a minor offence.

Worried by the fact that African birth rates outstrip whites, the government provides free contraception. The injected contraceptive Depo-Provera, which is cheap and effective but banned in many Western countries because of side-effects on women's health, is widely used.

Black women in South Africa do not just suffer. They have played an active role in the liberation movement, and today the importance of women's organisation and women's demands is recognised by both ANC and the black consciousness movement.

This recognition did not come without struggle. As late as 1955, the Freedom Charter made only the slightest and most abstract references to women's demands.

At the conference which adopted the Charter the Federation of South African Women put forward a whole series of demands relating to health care, education, housing, social services and food.

They included specific demands for women in the reserves/bantustans — the provision of medical, educational and shopping facilities, etc.

This proposal came under attack. The Congress leadership argued that it implied acceptance of the principle of separate reserves for Africans and criticised the women for not thinking the issue through clearly enough.

The Federation accepted this criticism and withdrew their proposal. But Cherryl Walker argues that the FSAW was being 'unnecessarily humble'. She writes:

"Merely ignoring those areas (bantustans) because they formed part of an unacceptable policy did not solve the problems of basic survival confronting the people living there. Nor did it assist those people develop their own strategies for resisting the very policies which kept them in an impoverished and dependent position". (Women and Resistance in South Africa).

Another controversial aspect of the Federation's doument, 'what women demand', was its call for birth control clinics (fulfilled in perverted form by the white government since then). This demand, which went against deeply ingrained ideas about female sexuality, was not included in the Freedom Charter.

Apart from a general statement about 'equal rights for all without discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, sex or belief' and apart from one clause calling for special medical care for mothers and young children, the Charter had nothing to say about the democratic rights of women.

Another arena in which women had to fight to make their voice heard was the fight against pass laws. For many years the white government, assuming that African women would stay on the land and were not wage workers, had not required them to have pass books. In 1952 they started to impose pass laws on women. It took a fierce struggle over many years before they succeeded.

The climax came in the Johannesburg anti-pass protests of 1958. By this time the government had succeeded in issuing about a million pass books to African women, mainly in the rural areas. Now the acid test came as they began to take on the large towns.

A campaign of mass civil disobedience broke out, with active leadership given by the ANC Women's League and the Federation of South African Women. Thousands went to gaol and participated in demonstrations.

But the ANC leadership took a cautious stance. They argued that it was placing a large financial burden on Congress to get the women out of gaol. In any case, the ANC stressed that the anti-pass campaign was under their direction and not that of the women and that it was not obliged to consult with the Federation or the Women's League 'on each and every aspect'.

Momentum

Under intense pressure from the authorities, a mass demonstration was called off and in its place a 'parade' of about three or four thousand took place. At this point, when there was clearly a lull in the momentum of the campaign, the ANC decided that 'the first phase had ended' and called off the campaign.

Whether this was right or wrong was arguable. Perhaps it was better to call off the civil disobedience at its height rather than let it fizzle out. However, Cherryl Walker writes:

"It was essential for the ANC to follow up on the women's campaign. Having submitted to the ANC's authority, the women were entitled to expect that the participation of the men in the rest of the campaign would be active. In this they were disappointed.

The FSAW's report...concluded: 'The Federation awaits direction from the ANC as to the course which the anti-pass campaign will follow and requests that this direction may be given in the very near future...Women await with impatience the active entry of men into the anti-pass campaign'."

This request was repeated the following year but the leadership never materialised.

Women have also played a big role in the new non-racial unions. Some unions have taken successful action for equal pay and for maternity agreements.

There were 24 women general secretaries of unions in 1983, but this does not represent as much progress as it seems, for in the South African non-racial unions general secretary is usually seen as an administrative rather than a high-profile position.

Lydia Kompe, Transvaal organiser for a FOSATU union, notes that "No union has yet elected a branch chairlady...Perhaps a female treasurer, since people think a woman is more responsible and will be more careful with money...

"Even in textiles, where there's mostly women, I've never heard of a chairlady of the branch or a president" (quoted in McShane et al. p.87).



Arrest under the pass laws



Black youths arrested for going into a 'white' area

Socialism and the struggle for freedom

The best-known programme in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa is the Freedom Charter, published in 1955. It was produced by an alliance of the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congess, the South African Coloured People's Congress, and the white Congress of Democrats.

Liberal

The Charter has been criticised within the movement, mostly by more 'black-nationalist' groups like the Pan-Africanist Congress which split from the ANC in 1959 and the present-day black consciousness organisations. The critiques see the Charter as a white liberal document, and counterpose to it a range of politics varying from anti-white exclusively African nationalism to revolutionary socialism.

The PAC defined its aim as "government of the Africans by the Africans, and for the Africans, with everybody who owes his only loyalty to Africa and is prepared to accept the democratic rule of the African majority being regarded as African".

However, the Freedom Charter remains the best-known programme.

The Freedom Charter essentially calls for democracy in South Africa: a government 'based on the will of the people'; a democratic state; equal rights for all regardless of race, colour, sex or belief; an administration in which 'all people will be entitled to take part'; the abolition of all racist and apartheid laws and practices; due process under law; freedom of speech and organisation; the right to trade union organisation; social security, education and health care available for all; the land to be shared among those who work it; the reserves to be abolished; the people to share in the country's wealth; the right to trade guaranteed; the mines, banks and large industries to be nationalised.

Social democracy

It said nothing about socialism and its model was something not that different from West European social democracy.

The Communist Party endorsed this programme on the basis of a 'two stage' theory of revolution. The first stage was to be purely democratic; after democracy had been won, the second stage was to consist in the transition to socialism. In the first stage all democratic forces could unite together against apartheid; the working class struggle for socialism was put off into the future.

To give this theory a more radical appearance, the CP has also argued that the working class has a leading role in the first stage, and that this first stage is not simply capitalist democracy but some 'non-capitalist' road of development.

Denied

In reaction against this two-stage theory, some socialists have denied any independent status to the race question at all.

Reacting also against liberal capitalist views which see apartheid as an aberration totally contrary to the logic of capitalism, they have argued that apartheid is absolutely indispensable to capitalism in South Africa. Apartheid and capitalism are so closely intertwined that the only real struggle against apartheid is the working-class struggle for socialism.

They have criticised the Freedom Charter basically for sowing the illusion that democracy is possible in South Africa short of socialist revolution.

This perspective ignores the fact that



Heavily armed railway police

race *is* a crucial basis of oppression in South Africa and that no amount of theoretical sophistry will dissolve it into the contradictions of 'capital itself'. *All* blacks, as blacks, do have an interest in the overthrow of the apartheid state; apartheid is often the most pressing form of oppression felt by blacks; and black workers can ally with other blacks in common opposition to apartheid and they would be foolish to ignore this opportunity for common action.

Alliance

Those socialists who deny this cut themselves off not only from this possibility of alliance between workers and other democrats; they also cut themselves off from the working class itself which is reminded every day — by Pass Laws, white police, colour bars etc — that the achievement of political liberty and the overthrow of apartheid is their *own* immediate goal as well.

The struggle for socialism is *not* the only struggle in South Africa for black workers. They want trade union rights, political suffrage, freedom of movement, access to all jobs regardless of race, equality before the law, the end of despotic laws and so forth. Socialists who have failed to recognise this end up necessarily in the most arid sectarianism.

An alternative socialist reaction against the 'two stage' theory of the Communist Party has been to declare that the Freedom Charter *is* a socialist programme in that it sets out to nationalise the commanding heights of industry. This is nonsense; nationalisation is not necessarily socialism, and in South Africa state ownership in industry has always been extensive. Some 58% of South Africa's fixed capital stock is state-owned.

The other version of this argument is that the Freedom Charter is effectively socialist because, though formally it demands nothing not possible under capitalism, in practice it could not be realised short of socialism. But a socialist programme is not just, or even mainly, a list of measures too radical to be accommodated by capitalism. It is a comprehensive explanation of how society can be transformed by the working class.

Whatever its merits as a democratic programme, the Freedom Charter is certainly not socialist.

Declamatory

The more serious criticism of the Freedom Charter is that — considered as a democratic programme — it is not sufficiently democratic.

It is declamatory, failing to link its general principles to immediate demands. It says almost nothing about the democratic rights of women.

And the Congress Alliance was explicitly *not* non-racial; it was rather multi-racial. It expressed an alliance based on distinct racially defined groupings: African, Indian, Coloured and European, who came together in order to fight the common enemy of apartheid. Each of the organisations involved concentrated on and represented their own particular racial grouping.

This multi-racial conception was clearly expressed in Point Two of the Freedom Charter:

"All national groups shall have equal rights. There shall be equal status in the bodies of the state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races; all national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride; all people shall have equal rights to use their own language and to develop their own folk culture and customs; the preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime; all apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside."

This multi-racialism has been the subject of much debate in the liberation movement. The principal problem with the Charter lies not with what it includes, but with what it leaves out. It is quite correct that the rights of different groupings in South Africa should be protected by a democratic government; any kind of discrimination on the grounds of race or nationality would be entirely unacceptable.

Racial

But the democratic goal is to do away with racial categories altogether, that is, to achieve a society in which racial identification plays no part. There is no trace of this democratic aspiration in the Charter and in this it reflects the racial basis of the Alliance which formed the Charter.

The Communist Party based itself on the 'lifeless, logic chopping interpretation of Stalin's definition of nation'. No Sizwe quotes the 'unadulterated liberal bourgeois conclusion' reached by the USSR theorist Potehkin: "Today in South Africa the process of forming two national societies continues, that of the Bantu and of the Anglo-Afrikaner. There are no grounds for assuming that one nation can be formed which would embrace the Bantu, the Coloureds and the Anglo-Afrikaners. The Coloureds could not at this time become a component part of the national Bantu group, they do not know the Bantu languages and in language, cultural forms and self-consciousness they tend to identify themselves with the Anglo-Afrikaners. The Indians are completely a separate group." (No Sizwe, 'One Azania , one nation', p.98).

The lack of democratic perspective diverted attention away from the question of the class character and class leadership of the alliance. Rather than appearing as what it was — an alliance between different classes of the oppressed it appeared as an alliance of different racial groupings under the dominance of the majority race, the Africans. The class question was buried beneath the surface.

The burial of class issues in the Freedom Charter meant the isolation of democratic aspirations from the immediate social demands of the black working class.

The Charter abstracts its vision of a future democratic South Africa from any class content. What this means in practice is not the actual elimination of class issues, but the subordination of those things which are most important to workers to forces outside the working class.

This issue of democratic struggle and socialist struggle has been discussed before, notably among Russian Marxists

before and around 1917. Though the specific circumstances are very different, the general method used by Marxists in Russia can be illuminating for South Africa.

The Russian Marxists faced a capitalist society; but not just any capitalist society. Russia was under the semi-feudal rule of the Tsar (Emperor) and his nobility and bureaucracy.

Some people thought that the growth of capitalist industry would almost automatically lead to capitalist liberalism overthrowing Tsarism. At some point after that first stage would come a second stage in which the working class overthrew capitalist liberalism.

Lenin and Trotsky rejected that view. While being willing to ally with the liberals for any real struggle, they placed no faith in them at all. The liberals' hostility to Tsarism was much more feeble than their fear of the working class.

So Trotsky (and eventually Lenin) looked to a working-class revolution to overthrow Tsarism.

But that perspective did not mean neglecting the democratic, 'anti-Tsarist' issues, or dissolving them into a general socialist programme. On the contrary: land to the peasants, a Constituent Assembly, an eight-hour day, were the leading slogans.

Trotsky argued that the working class could and should take the lead on the basis of those democratic slogans. But it would do so according to the tempo and the logic of the class struggle, not of any abstract scheme. Direct class issues would intertwine with the democratic issues at each turn. When the working class triumphed, it could do so only on the basis of its own programme: working class rule, public ownership of industry.

While fighting for this perspective, Trotsky did not deny other possibilities. It was possible that the working class, having smashed the old order, would see its victory confiscated by the bourgeoisie and turned into a merely 'democratic' revolution. It was conceivable that the ruling class — spurred on by, and attempting to pre-empt, revolt from below — would transform the system from above, albeit in a limited, bureaucratic, way.

Likewise in South Africa. South African capitalism's profits are based on the system which reduces black people to cheap labour devoid of rights. If progress depends on the feeble proposals made every so often by South African big business for some liberalisation, then it will be a very long time indeed coming. South African capital needs the racist system.

But capital does not always get what it needs. The black workers are and must be the driving force of the struggle against white supremacy; they will conduct that struggle by the rhythms and methods appropriate to their own class interests, combining it with their own direct class demands, and fighting for a victory which will merge a democratic and a socialist revolution. But it would be a mistake to underestimate the flexibility of capitalism.

That mistake was already made by many South African leftists in the 1970s, when they underestimated the new non-racial unions or condemned them as 'economistic' and 'reformist' because they thought that the apartheid state could not possibly allow genuine non-racial unions to exist for any time at all.

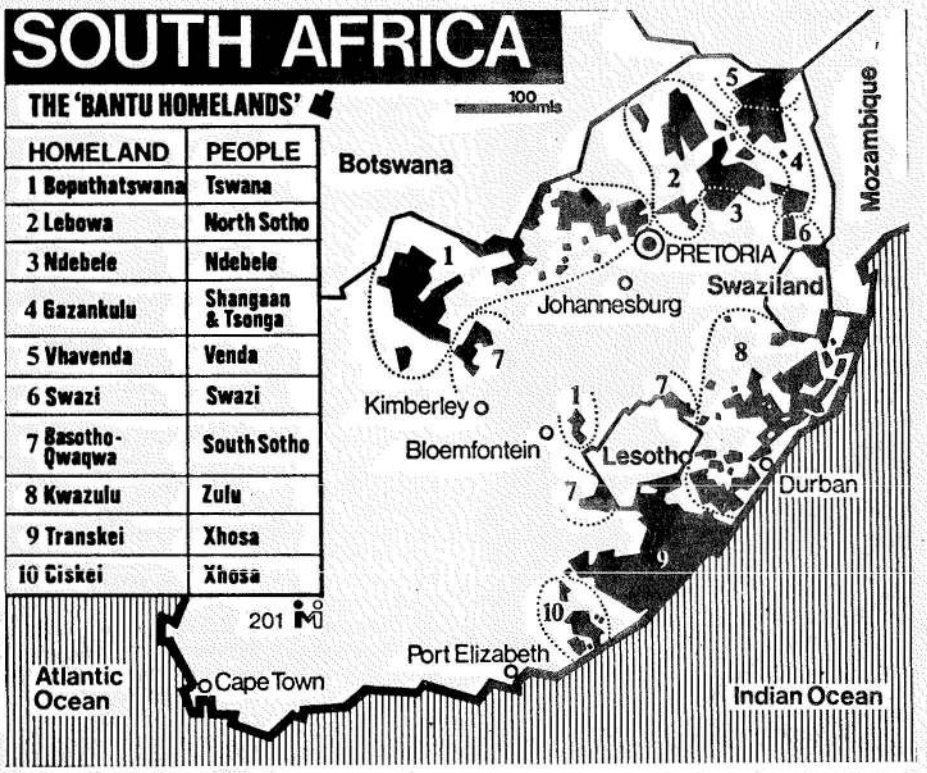
The state did not tolerate the unions out of generosity. But it was forced to let them develop.

There are a number of possibilities now other than socialist revolution or total defeat.

Since the 1970s especially a small but real middle class has developed in the black townships.

The overthrow of white supremacy could be followed by the black middle class establishing their rule and suppressing the black workers. Or, under extreme pressure, the white regime might reform itself drastically and manage to stabilise that reformed version by use of repression.

Both the CP theory of 'two stages' and the scholastic theory of socialist revolution or nothing fail to grasp the reality of what is happening now or the range of possible outcomes.



A black republic

In this extract from a letter to South African comrades, Leon Trotsky discussed the 'two-stage' strategy for South Africa, and the slogan of a Black Republic. (From Trotsky's 'Writings', 1934-5).

The South African possessions of Great Britain form a dominion only from the point of view of the white minority. From the point of the black majority, South Africa is a slave colony.

No social upheaval (in the first instance, an agrarian revolution) is thinkable with the retention of British imperialism in the South African dominion. The overthrow of British imperialism in South Africa is just as indispensable for the triumph of socialism in South Africa as it is for Great Britain itself.

If, as it is possible to assume, the revolution will start first in Great Britain, the less support the British bourgeoisie will find in the colonies and dominions, including so important a possession as South Africa, the quicker will be their defeat at home. The struggle for the expulsion of British imperialism, its tools and agents thus enters as an indispensable part of the programme of the South African proletarian party.

The overthrow of the hegemony of British imperialism in South Africa can come about as the result of a military defeat of Great Britain and the disintegration of the empire. In this case, the South African whites could still, for a certain period — hardly a considerable one — retain their domination over the blacks.

Another possibility, which in practice could be connected with the first, is a revolution in Great Britain and her possessions. Three-quarters of the population of South Africa (almost six million of the almost eight million total) is composed of non-Europeans. A victorious revolution is unthinkable without the awakening of the native masses. In its turn, that will give them what they are so lacking today — confidence in their strength, a heightened personal consciousness, a cultural growth.

Under these conditions, the South Afri-

can republic will emerge first of all as a "black" republic; this does not exclude, of course, either full equality for the whites or brotherly relations between the two races — depending mainly on the conduct of the whites. But it is entirely obvious that the predominant majority of the population, liberated from slavish dependence, will put a certain imprint on the state.

Insofar as a victorious revolution will radically change the relation not only between the classes but also between the races and will assure to the blacks that place in the state that corresponds to their numbers, thus far will the *social* revolution in South Africa also have a *national* character.

We have not the slightest reason to close our eyes to this side of the question or to diminish its significance. On the contrary, the proletarian party should in words and in deeds openly and boldly take the solution of the national (racial) problem in its hands.

Nevertheless, the proletarian party can and must solve the national problem by *its own* methods.

Weapon

The historical weapon of national liberation can be only the *class struggle*. The Comintern, beginning in 1924, transformed the programme of national liberation of colonial people into an empty democratic abstraction that is elevated above the reality of class relations. In the struggle against national oppression, different classes liberate themselves (temporarily) from material interests and become simple "anti-imperialist" forces.

In order that these spiritual "forces" bravely fulfill the task assigned to them by the Comintern, they are promised, as a reward, a spiritual "national-democratic" state — with the unavoidable reference to Lenin's formula: "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry".

When the theses say that the slogan of a "black republic" is *equally* harmful for the revolutionary cause as is the slogan of a "South Africa for the whites", then we cannot agree with the form of the statement. Whereas in the latter there is the case of supporting complete oppression, in the former there is the case of taking the first steps toward liberation.

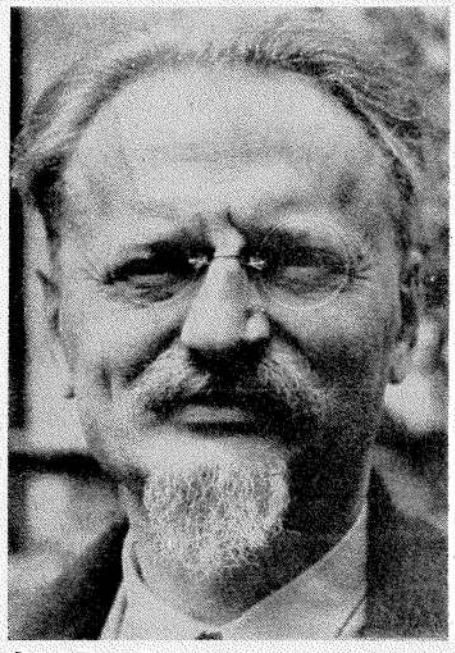
We must accept decisively and without any reservations the complete and unconditional right of the blacks to independence. Only on the basis of a mutual struggle against the domination of the white exploiters can the solidarity of black and white toilers be cultivated and strengthened.

It is possible that *after victory* the blacks will find it unnecessary to form a separate black state in South Africa. Certainly we will not *force them* to establish a separate state. But let them make this decision freely, on the basis of their own experience, and not forced by the *sjambok* (whip) of the white oppressors. The proletarian revolutionaries must never forget the right of the oppressed nationalities to self-determination, including full separation, and the duty of the proletariat of the oppressing nation to defend this right with arms in hand, if necessary.

The theses quite correctly underline the fact that the solution to the national question in Russia was brought about by the October Revolution. National democratic movements by themselves were powerless to cope with the national oppression of czarism. Only because of the fact that the movement of the oppressed nationalities, as well as the agrarian movement of the peasantry, gave the proletariat the possibility of seizing power and establishing its dictatorship did the national question as well as the agrarian find a bold and decisive solution.

But the very conjuncture of the national movements with the struggle of the proletariat for power was made politically possible only thanks to the fact that the Bolsheviks during the whole of their history carried on an irreconcilable struggle with the Great Russian oppressors, supporting always and without reservations the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination, including separation from Russia.

The policy of Lenin in regard to the oppressed nations did not, however, have anything in common with the policy of the epigones. The Bolshevik Party defended the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination *with the methods of proletarian class struggle*, entirely rejecting the charlatan "anti-imperialist" blocs with the numerous petty-bourgeois "national"



Leon Trotsky

parties of czarist Russia (the Polish Socialist Party [PPS — the party of Pilsudski in czarist Poland], Dashnaki in Armenia, the Ukrainian nationalists, the Jewish Zionists, etc., etc.).

The Bolsheviks have always mercilessly unmasked these parties, as well as the Russian Social Revolutionaries, their vacillations and adventurism, but especially their ideological lie of being above the class struggle. Lenin did not stop his intransigent criticism even when circumstances forced upon him this or that episodic, strictly practical, agreement with them.

There could be no question of any permanent alliance with them under the banner of "anti-czarism". Only thanks to this *irreconcilable* class policy was Bolshevism able to succeed in the time of the revolution to throw aside the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries, the national petty-bourgeois parties and gather around the proletariat the masses of the peasantry and the oppressed nationalities.

"We must not," say the theses, "compete with the African National Congress in nationalist slogans in order to win the native masses". The idea is in itself correct, but it requires concrete amplification. Being insufficiently acquainted with the activities of the National Congress, I can only outline our policy concerning it on the basis of analogies, stating beforehand my readiness to supplement my recommendations with all the necessary modifications.

1. The Bolshevik Leninists put themselves in defence of the Congress, as it is, in all cases when it is being attacked by the white oppressors and their chauvinistic agents in the ranks of the workers' organisations.

2. The Bolshevik-Leninists place the progressive over the reactionary tendencies in the programme of the Congress.

3. The Bolshevik-Leninists unmask before the native masses the inability of the Congress to achieve the realisation of even its own demands, because of its superficial, conciliatory policy. In contradistinction to the Congress, the Bolshevik-Leninists develop a programme of revolutionary class struggle.

4. Separate episodic agreements with the Congress, if they are forced by circumstances, are permissible only within the framework of strictly defined practical tasks, with the retention of full and complete independence of our own organisation and freedom of political criticism.

The these bring out as the main political slogan not a "national democratic state" but a South African "October". The theses prove, and prove convincingly:

a. that the national and agrarian questions in South Africa coincide in their bases;

b. that both these questions can be solved only in a revolutionary way;

c. that the revolutionary solution of these questions leads inevitably to the dictatorship of the proletariat, which guides the native peasant masses; and,

d. that the dictatorship of the proletariat will open an era of a soviet regime and socialist reconstruction. This conclusion is the cornerstone of the whole structure of the programme. Here we are in complete agreement.

Slogans

But the masses must be brought to this general "strategic" formula through the medium of a series of tactical slogans. It is possible to work out these slogans, at every given stage, only on the basis of an analysis of the concrete circumstances of the life and struggle of the proletariat and the peasantry and the whole internal and international situation.

The proletariat of the country consists of backward black pariahs and a privileged, arrogant caste of whites. In this lies the greatest difficulty of the whole situation. As the theses correctly state, the economic convulsions of rotting capitalism must strongly shake the old barriers and facilitate the work of revolutionary coalescence.

In any case, the worst crime on the part of the revolutionaries would be to give the smallest concessions to the privileges and prejudices of the whites. Whoever gives his little finger to the devil of chauvinism is lost.

The revolutionary party must put before every white worker the following alternative: either with British imperialism and with the white bourgeoisie of South Africa or with the black workers and peasants against the white feudalists and slave owners and their agents in the ranks of the working class.



Umkhonto We Sizwe fighters

The ANC and its strategy

THE ANC (within which the CP is influential) is the strongest organisation of the South African liberation movement. It has a substantial apparatus and well-established international links, especially with the black African states.

So why, since 1973, have militant black workers been turning away from the leadership of the CP? An examination of three important struggles — the African miners' strike of 1946, the mass strikes after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, and the ANC's turn to armed struggle in 1961 — will show why.

The historic strength of the CP among the workers lay in the fact that it had been one of the principal carriers of the flag of non-racial unionism, when a combination of state legislation, Afrikaner nationalism and the protective racism of skilled white workers was consolidating deep racial divisions within the South African working class. In 1925 the CP took over a leading role in the South African Trade Union Congress (SATUC), which organised white and coloured workers on an industrial basis and African workers in 'parallel' unions (in order to evade legal problems: this was immediately after the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act, which reinforced racial divisions by banning pass-bearing Africans from belonging to registered unions).

However, these unions came under tight bureaucratic control. And the CP was not quite alone in supporting non-racial industrial unionism. Solly Sachs, a leftist who was expelled from the CP in 1931, was leader of the Garment Workers' Union, which opposed the racially discriminatory provisions and bureaucratic controls imposed by the

Industrial Conciliation Act, and managed for some time to hold on to both its Afrikaner women workers (often poor women coming straight from the farms) and its African and coloured members. It too attempted to by-pass the law by setting up a 'parallel' union for African workers.

Sachs' union displayed a much higher level of militancy that most SATUC unions but it largely succumbed in the 1930s, the victim of police repression, of a strident campaign of Afrikaaner nationalism, and of its own isolation within the trade union movement. SATUC survived the period intact. Thus when the upsurge of African workers' industrial militancy came during World War 2, the CP solidly dominated the field of non-racial unionism.

The CP (in conjunction with the ANC, which at that time was a petty bourgeois movement with little or no links with the African working class) had also set up the African Mineworkers Union. During World War 2, the militancy of the African mineworkers reached a fierce peak. Most of them were migrant labourers whose families had to be left behind on the Reserves. The rapid decline in the productive base of the Reserves led to mass starvation of the miners' families, while the wages of the miners themselves were eroded by inflation and were only half the average industrial African wage.

The rank and file miners sought substantial wage increases to ward off starvation, and wanted to strike immediately at the mineowners and the state while they were made vulnerable by the war.

During the war there were over 60 unofficial and illegal strikes.

The CP and ANC leadership, however, persistently suppressed these movements, *putting the national war effort and the demands of 'legality' before the interests and survival of the workers.* For Stalinism, the Second World War was not an imperialist robbers' war, but a war of democracy (the Allies) against fascism (the Axis powers) — and South Africa, despite everything, was on the side of democracy.

It was the spontaneous action of the workers which finally initiated the massive mineworkers' strike of 1946, forcing the CP and ANC leadership to back them half-heartedly and without preparation, two days after the strike began. JB Marks, the president of the African Mineworkers' Union, warned the strikers "emphatically" against the use of violence. Otherwise all he did was to call on the industrial unions in CNETU (Council of Non-European Trade Unions, a reformed version of SATUC) to support the miners, but they, without any prior mobilisation or preparation, were totally incapable of following this call through. The strike was defeated, terribly and bloodily. The last-minute call for a CNETU general strike was a debacle.

The CP's disastrous 'leadership' of the mineworkers shows what Stalin's words really meant when he dissolved the Comintern in 1943: the dissolution would, he said, "facilitate the organisation of the common onslaught of all freedom-loving nations against the common enemy".

The CP sought a "common onslaught" with the freedom-loving owners of the South African mines; with the freedom-loving state, whose police, it is estimated, killed 12 and wounded over 1200 strikers, and baton-charged the miners as they staged a sit-down strike underground, driving them up "stope by stope, level by level" to the surface and back to their compounds; and with the freedom-loving courts who put on trial the entire executive of the CP and scores of officials from the ANC, CNETU and other trade unions. This attempt seriously undermined the independent workers' movement for years afterwards.

The class organisation and mobilisation of the African proletariat, which peaked in 1945-6, soon declined. By 1950 66 African unions had become defunct.

In the wake of the defeat, a much firmer alliance was formed between the ANC and the CP, as the ANC turned from the patient and dignified expression of the grievances of an African elite to a strategy of mass action and passive resistance, on a programme of democratic and nationalist demands. The CP and its worker-militants turned eagerly to this alliance.

In the mid-'50s, the African working class began to recover its momentum. SACTU was formed in 1955, at the initiative of the CP and the ANC, out of some of the remants of CNETU. It soon gathered strength, on a basis of non-racial industrial unionism and the inseparability of economic and political struggle.

Subordination

In practice, however, the alliance between the organised workers and their petty bourgeois allies in the ANC meant once again *subordination of the workers' struggles to the limits of the democratic and nationalist programme of the petty bourgeoisie.*

Programmatically, SACTU supported the Freedom Charter, adopted in 1955 by the Congress Alliance, of which the ANC was a key element. The Charter, despite its commitment to transfer the mines, banks and monopoly industry to "ownership of the people as a whole" is a non-socialist document which envisages a South Africa where "the people shall govern".

The ANC theorised the South African revolution as a struggle for national democracy, for national liberation of the oppressed African people and for full democratic rights for the black people of South Africa — *through the democratisation of South Africa*, and not through the seizure of power by the working class. Until the turn to armed struggle in 1961, this 'democratisation' was envisaged as a gradual process of reform.

The 'election strike' of 1958 was an example. From the ranks of SACTU workers the call for a national strike was raised on the basis of demands for £1 a day minimum wage, shorter hours, trade union recognition, and an end to pass laws (which bound workers to their jobs at the risk of expulsion). Their main slogan was "Asinamali, sifunamali" — we have no money, we want money.

The response of the SACTU leadership and of the CP was to channel this militancy into mass action for the coming elections on behalf of the United Party — the official opposition party, solidly bourgeois, solidly white-supremacist, differing from the ruling Nationalists only in secondary matters arising from the fact that the UP drew support more from the English-speaking whites while the Nationalists were primarily based on the Afrikaners. The stay-at-home was scheduled for election day, with the slogan 'Nats must go'. The CP's leading underground theorist, Michael Harmel, called on the United Party to "meet the people's leaders" and to recognise "the justice of their demands", the necessity of a "democratic revolution", and the "anachronism" of the "traditional type of despotism".

The General Election became the focus of the campaign; demands for £1 a day and the abolition of pass laws were submerged. Not surprisingly, the response of the workers was poor, despite their industrial militancy, though in areas where thre was local organisation based around demands for higher wages (such as Durban docks), mass action did effectively take place.

After one day, Oliver Tambo, secretary of the ANC, called off the stay-at-home, declaring that "the purpose of the protest had been achieved" and that "the country was engaged in the serious question of choosing a government".

The ruling Nationalist Party increased their majority, the United Party did not shift an inch, Luthuli (the head of the ANC) called on the Nationalists to "mend their ways", and they responded by increasing their armoury of repressive legislation.

Although SACTU had pushed, against the ANC leadership, in favour of economic strikes, it was dragged, with CP backing, into impotent protest campaigns.

The next wave of working class mobilisation came in 1960 in the aftermath of the police massacre of Africans protesting against the pass laws at Sharpeville and elsewhere. In Cape Town, for example, strikes spread in the following weeks from one factory to the next, until practically the whole of the city's docks and industries were crippled. The workers, often armed with sticks and other weapons, took to the streets in huge numbers.

This momentum towards a general strike was diverted by the liberal wing of the ANC (Chief Luthuli) into a call for a day of "solemn mourning" for the dead. he stressed that this was not to be a strike, and asked the government to "allow" African leaders to meet, lest a "further deterioration in race relations" should occur. The nationalist, Christian ethics of Luthuli were not capable of taking the largely spontaneous actions of the workers — pass-burning, strikes and demonstrations — forward. But neither were the CP or SACTU; they supported the day of mourning.

The workers, however, pursued the struggle way beyond the plans of their leaders. The stay-at-home spread over the whole country. In Cape Town alone, over 60,000 workers were on strike, and, despite the arrest of 12,000 people by the police, something like 30,000 workers marched to the city centre — at that time, a maze of narrow streets — and for a short time it was practically in their hands.

The inexperience of their student leader, Philip Kgosana, defused the action, when he instructed the workers to go home in return for the promise of an interview with the Justice Minister and an assurance that the police would stop using force. He was arrested a few hours later.

It was inevitable that the strike would be broken; it was ill-prepared, and the ANC, the CP and SACTU gave no adequate leadership. They were incapable of raising the perspective of seizing political power, rather than just demanding concessions.

A week later, the leaders of the ANC were in gaol, the workers were exhausted



ANC exiles in Mozambique

and demoralised in the face of an onslaught of police repression, and the pass burning demonstrations had now turned into queues for reference books. At this point of downturn, the ANC called hopelessly for a general strike, a call the workers were by now incapable of meeting.

The political leadership of the CP and ANC, and their organ of working class organisation, SACTU, had proved incapable of building on the spontaneous upsurge in class consciousness and militancy, and of leading it forward to a perspective based on the independent power of the workers, that is, towards a general strike and towards bolder and bolder demands based on the logic of the workers' struggle. A revolutionary orientation would start out with democratic demands linked to a revolutionary perspective of overthrowing the white racist regime, a regime organically incapable of serious democratic reforms; and it would see democratic demands as only the first stage in the workers' mobilisation, understanding that the development of that mobilisation towards socialist demands and towards workers' power would be necessary to really win the democratic demands. In short, the revolutionary perspective would be the one outlined by Trotsky: "On the basis of the revolutionary democratic programme it is necessary to oppose the workers to the 'national' bourgeoisie. Then, at a certain stage in the mobilisation of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise...Sooner or later, the soviets should overthrow bourgeois democracy."

In fact, such an orientation was passively but systematically blocked by the CP/ANC leadership, at the cost of a terrible hammering for the working class as the forces of repression duly reacted.

In the official histories, the turn to armed struggle after Sharpeville appears as the major step in the development of a revolutionary stance by the liberation movement, as it finally broke the bounds of legalism and non-violent protest.

As a leading ANC theorist, Ben Turok, put it:

"The shootings at Sharpeville marked a turning point...[*They*] broke the belief that a non-violent solution was possible... and they destroyed any hope that the legal system could be used to halt police repression...The foundation for the transfer from non-violence to armed struggle was being laid."

However, from the point of view of the working class, this marked the end of its forward movement, and the beginning of a period of weakness and defeat, not to be broken for a decade or more.

The CP took the initiative, calling for a sabotage campaign that was taken up by the ANC. Their conception was one of an escalating programme of sabotage which, through the force of its example, would draw the support of the masses, culminating finally in the general strike. The Pondo uprising, a violent rurual movement, nourished the hope that something like the Cuban or Vietnamese 'model' could be applied in South Africa.

Necessary

In the conditions of South Africa, guerilla and armed struggle may be a necessary front of revolutionary action. The creation of armed detachments may be vital if the regime is to be prevented from prevailing simply through monopoly of armed force. But the ANC's turn to armed struggle was counterposed to, not linked with and subordinated to, the struggle of the black industrial workers. In typical Stalinist bureaucratic fashion, armed struggle was proclaimed as the only valid form of struggle.

The actual effect was to isolate the vanguard from the masses, to foster a passive, waiting attitude on the part of the working class. The power of sabotage to penetrate the state's fast-growing armoury of repression was vastly overestimated: the 90-day Act led to a new wave of detentions and the use of torture provided the state with information on resistance plans which led to the arrest of most of the experienced SACTU and ANC leaders.

By 1964, Umkhonto We Sizwe, the military arm of the ANC, had been routed by the political police. They had committed 193 acts of sabotage in this period, causing damage estimated at under £100,000. Since then, armed actions have continued in a very limited and sporadic way. The brave fighters of Unkhonto We Sizwe deserve our solidarity in their battles against the apartheid state, whatever our criticisms of their leaders. But the ANC's armed struggle soon obviously made no sense according to its original rationale: to rapidly provoke a revolutionary crisis. It made sense only as an effort to show, for the benefit of the ANC's diplomatic connections, that the ANC has a viable armed apparatus.

Since the 1960s, with the rise of independent black African states and the increasing isolation in Africa of South Africa, it has become possible for the ANC to see the road to success in terms of maintaining a political and military apparatus (often through great heroism on the part of its militants), establishing diplomatic links, and trying to bring about the collapse of the apartheid state through international pressure. Whatever the changes of success for this strategy in its own terms, it clearly leaves no room for the leading role of black working class self-mobilisation and self-organisation.

After 1961, the turn to armed struggle hived off the best worker militants. Instead of organising workers at the point of production, they were sent away from the factories for external military training. They ended up either in exile, or on their return to South Africa, in the hands of the polic — and the workers ended up destitute of leadership or organisation.

It was SACTU's specific role to act as a feeder for this operation. This was the substance of the politics with which it sought to linnk its economic and trade union demands, and this was the tragedy behind the heroism of its militants.

While it is true that the state can be overthrown by armed struggle, this struggle cannot be successfully conducted in isolation from the mass of the people; and the arming of the people in heavily-proletarianised South Africa requires the organisation of the working class. And for success in the armed struggle, the forces of reaction must be in disarray; that can only be achieved through the organisation of the working class and its mobilisation for industrial action and particularly for fighting mass strikes.

But after a few years of armed struggle, many of the most capable and militant activists of the ANC, the CP and SACTU were in exile, in prison or dead. The political work of the ANC inside the country was virtually destroyed, after it had devoted its energies to gathering financial support for Umkhonto We Sizwe; and the trade union organisations sank to their lowest ebb for years. By 1969 the organised sections of the black working class numbered only some 16,000 the lowest figure for 40 years, and only 56 strikes were officially reported. Meanwhile South African capitalism enjoyed a period of tremendous expansion and foreign support.

In the politics of protest dominant in the '50s, the working class was seen not as a vanguard, but as a mass resource used by the leadership to mount pressure for political concessions. In the period of armed struggle, the working class was basically left to fend for itself as its leadership moved into exile or isolation. The tasks of building up working class organisation, and of mobilising for fighting strikes, were put in the background.

This bureaucratic strategy has been responsible for the decline of SACTU's base among the African workers of South Africa. By its own admission, SACTU now possesses — with one or two exceptions — almost no organisational base inside South Africa.

Despite this the ANC and the South African CP unquestionably remain major forces in the liberation movement. In the recent period their politics and strategy have been carried forward by the UDF.

The ANC called a conference, its first since 1969, on June 16-23 1985, and declared a change of gear in its campaign.

In the 1960s the ANC and the SACP argued that South Africa was in a revolutionary situation, or at least that a revolutionary situation could rapidly be provoked by the guerilla struggle. Over time they gradually shifted into a longer-term perspective of guerilla harassment and international boycott to wear down the regime.

The June conference declared that the situation is again revolutionary and "the end of apartheid is near".

"We should step up our all-round political and military offensive sharply and without delay", said the conference communique. "The masses of our people have been and are engaged in a struggle of historic importance directed at making apartheid unworkable and the country ungovernable. They are creating conditions for the escalation of our attack leading towards the situation where it will be possible for us to overthrow the apartheid regime."

The ANC called for a full-scale armed uprising, and urged black police and soldiers to turn their guns against their masters.

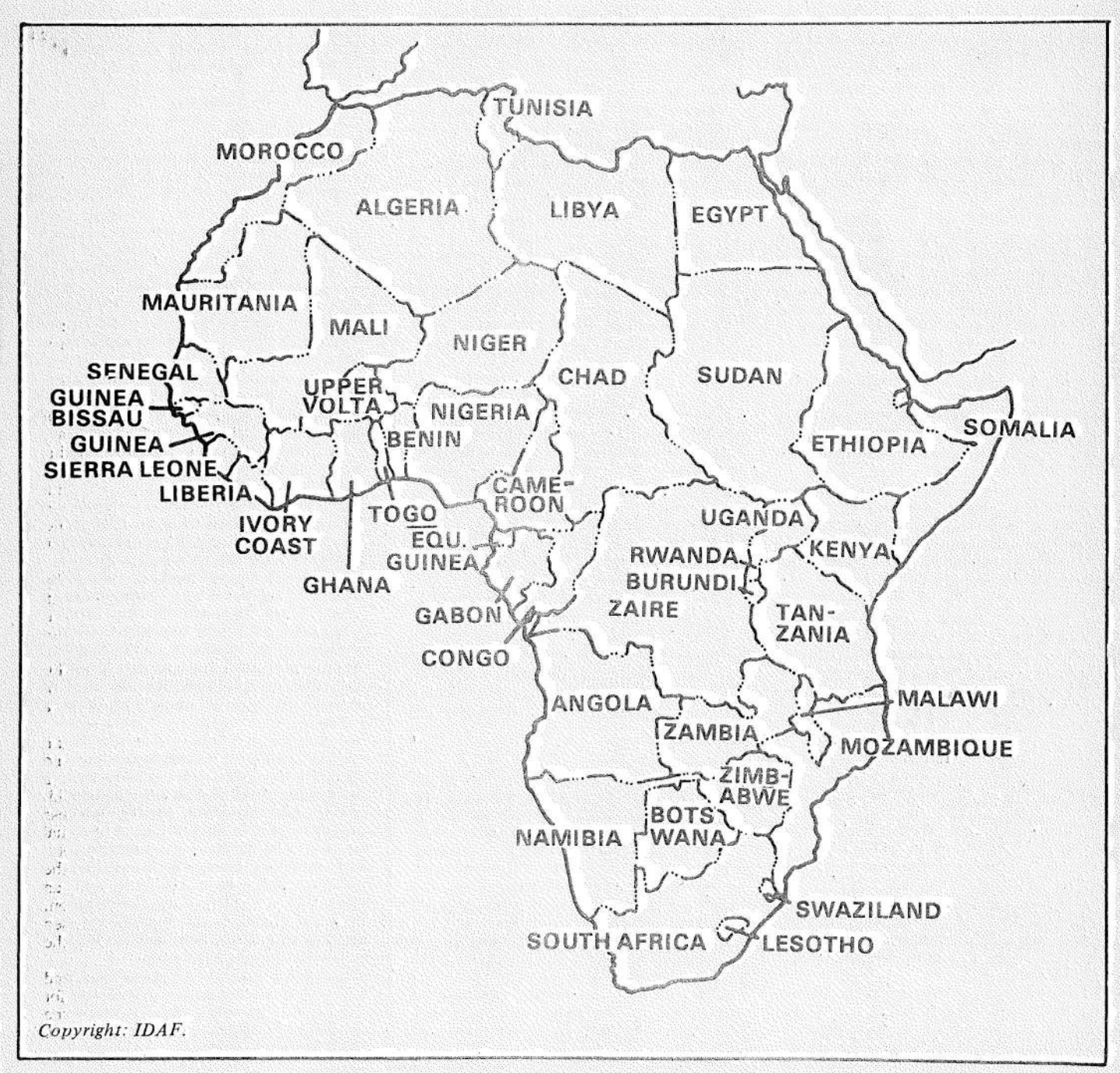
Boycott

It appears, however, that the ANC is not yet strong enough to organise a full-scale armed uprising. In fact its tactics concentrate on such things as a boycott of black township councils, to try to make South Africa ungovernable.

Such a stance has dangers. Repeated calls for revolution when the revolutionary forces are not able to put them into practice can demoralise the working class while alienating undecided middle-class people. A tragic historic example of this is the experience of the Italian Socialist Party after World War 1.

The country was in turmoil. The Socialist Party called repeatedly for revolution but was unable to do much about it. Towards the major struggles actually going on — the factory occupations in Turin — it was cool, regarding them as 'syndicalist' or 'economistic'. The result was that the factory occupations were isolated and eventually defeated; the working class became demoralised; and the alarmed middle-class soon put Mussolini into power.

As Rosa Luxemburg argued in relation to the Russian Revolution of 1905 (see pages 9-10), and as the experience in South Africa today shows, a period of revolution does not exclude the struggle for reforms and economic concessions, but boosts it. The ANC's current strategy therefore has a danger of cutting across the real logic of the class struggle, imposing instead an abstract confrontation between democracy and apartheid. It is both ultimatist in its relation to workers' immediate struggles, and limiting in relation to the objectives of a full workers' mobilisation.



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Namibian women

South Africa and Africa

The current crisis in South Africa is partly generated by successes for national liberation elsewhere in Africa.

But the South African state acts upon the rest of Africa as well as being acted upon by it. Through armed force, through diplomacy, and through economic links it has tried to establish itself as a 'sub-imperial' power.

Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, desperately poor states on the fringes of South Africa (or in the case of Lesotho surrounded by it), are higher-grade bantustans, dependent on their citizens travelling to work in South Africa.

Malawi under Hastings Banda is scarcely better off.

Mozambique and Angola have been directly invaded by South Africa since independence, as well as having right-wing guerilla movements funded by the white-supremacist state. In March 1984 Mozambique conceded to this pressure and signed an agreement with South Africa to exclude ANC guerillas from Mozambique. South Africa has also undertaken the management of Maputo harbour, and is repairing power pylons to the Cabora Bassa dam. The right wing guerillas continue their sabotage, with South Africa now disclaiming all responsibility; in many areas of Mozambique there is mass starvation.

In Angola South Africa's immediate military objective is to cut off bases for SWAPO.

Further afield, South Africa's giant Anglo American corporation does business in many black African countries.

The South African black working class could also have a deep effect on the rest of Africa, for the good. The failures of middle class nationalist governments are increasingly clear. In Tanzania Julius Nyere has admitted the collapse of his 'African-socialist' experiment. In Zimbabwe Mugabe has used laws inherited from British colonialism against the workers, and is planning a one-party state. In much of Africa millions are starving.

The South African working class is by far the most powerful working class in Africa. It has the power, the skills, and (if it can seize it from the hands of the white profiteers) the wealth to tackle many of Africa's problems. It could lead a revolution which would make the old ideal of uniting Africa in a single federation a reality.

A socialist revolution led by the South African black workers can thus unite and merge with several other revolutions: a democratic revolution against apartheid; an agrarian revolution by the landless peasants in the bantustans; a national revolution in Namibia; a workers' revolution spreading through Africa against the present middle-class regimes; and an international democratic revolution, breaking the irrational borders imposed on Africa by colonialism and uniting the continent in a free federation.

This combination is not guaranteed, and none of the other struggles should wait for the socialist revolution. But for certain the revolution in South Africa will be more than just South African.

Namibia

South African capital, and multinational capital allied with the South African state, exploit blacks in Namibia even more than blacks in South Africa.

Namibia (South West Africa) was annexed by Germany in 1884, and subdued in a bloody colonial war in 1904-6. During the First World War South Africa seized it from Germany.

In 1966 the United Nations called on South Africa to withdraw, but despite much diplomacy South African troops remain there.

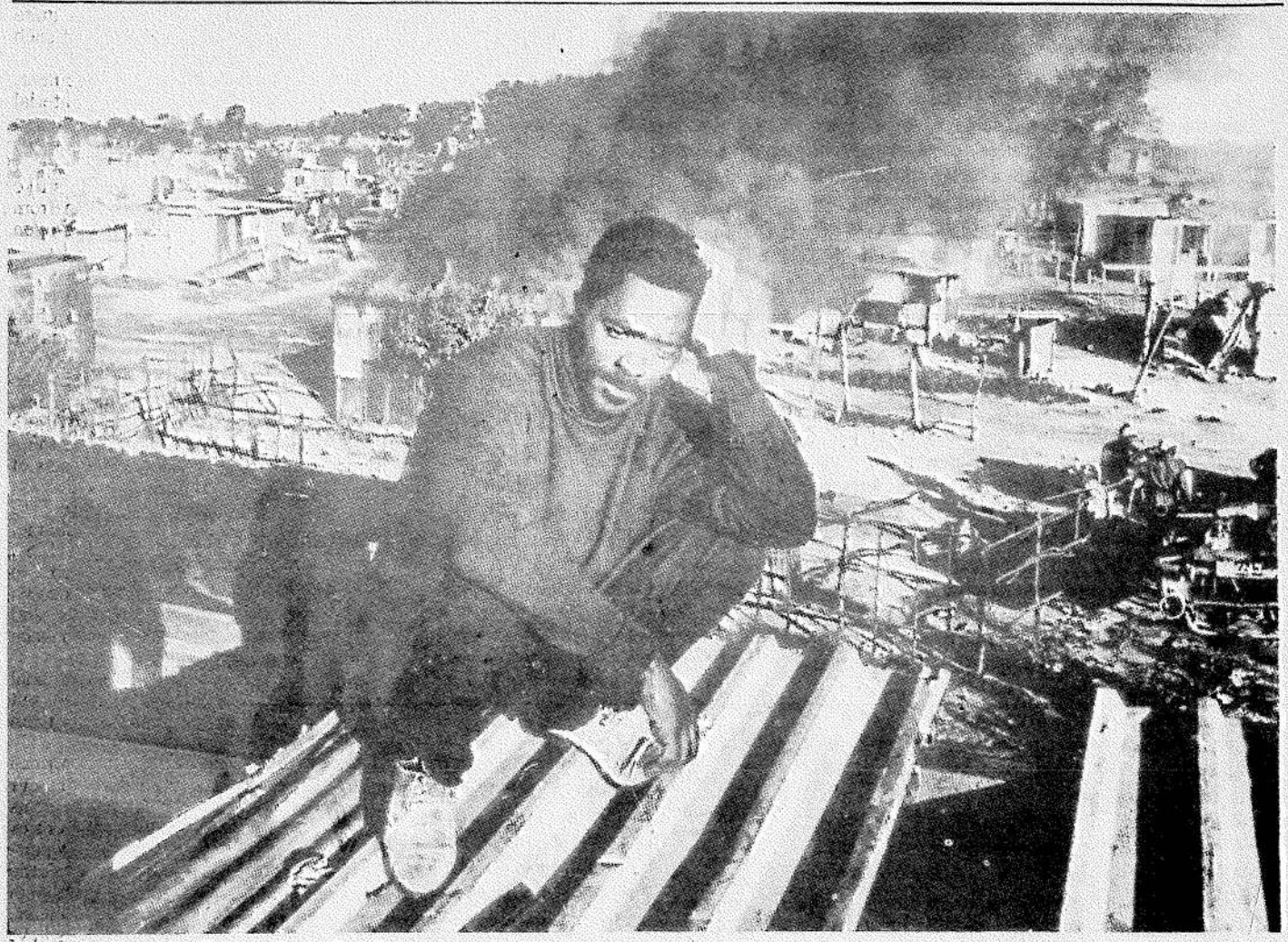
Namibia is a sparsely populated country of great mineral wealth. It has the world's biggest uranium mine at Rossing, rich diamond mines, and some big white-owned ranches.

90% of what it produces is exported, and in an average year over half the national income goes to profits and taxes. The 1.2 million blacks have an average income no higher than in Tanzania. (Namibia also has about 150,000 Coloureds and maybe 50,000 whites).

45% of the labour force are migrant contract workers in the mines or ranches.

The diamond mines are owned by De Beers, and Rossing is 46.5% owned by the British-based company Rio Tinto Zinc.

Even the South African government concedes that the liberation movement SWAPO would win a majority in a free election.



We can't allow the fight to be isolated

International solidarity

Solidarity with the liberation movement in South Africa is a duty for workers everywhere — and especially a duty for workers in Britain given British imperialism's historic and current connections with the white-supremacist state.

One particular form of solidarity has been highly controversial in the British labour movement.

Should British trade unionists visit their fellow trade unionists in South Africa? Should they encourage South African trade unions to send representatives here? Should they support international combine meetings to which South African trade unionists are invited? These and other related issues make up what has come to be known as the 'direct links' issue.

To answer these questions we need to know what the independent unions want; what sort of union-to-union links have occurred and what is feasible; what purposes such links serve, and what dangers are associated with them.

Direct contact between officials and rank and file members of British and South African trade unions has been a crucial element in building effective solidarity. Since 1973 the independent unions in South Africa have developed a stream of contacts with European trade union bodies.

Union officials and shop stewards from South Africa have visited overseas and union officials and shop stewards from here have visited South Africa. All the independent unions in South Africa are seeking international trade union contacts.

The most active and largest groups — FOSATU, SAAWU, GWU, CUSA — have

Barclays Bank is the largest foreign company operating in South Africa. At the beginning of this year, the bank's total South African assets stood at around £10 billion. Its pre-tax profits for 1984 were £58 million.

Barclays lends vast amounts to South African state institutions. In 1976 it bought £6 million worth of South African government Defence Bonds, thereby directly funding the armed forces. The bonds were sold after an international outcry, but Barclays has helped finance arms sales to apartheid.

Barclays directors are trustees of the South Africa Foundation, which distributes pro-apartheid propaganda abroad.

In 1980 Barclays published a report, 'Doing Business in South Africa', that encouraged investment in the country. It commented, 'the [political] situation is well under control and generally the labour force is content."

Barclays' operations in Namibia contravene United Nations rulings.

A recent Barclays video film, 'The Visionary Eagle', shown to all new staff, covers South Africa, but does not even mention apartheid. As the 'Barclays Shadow Report' for 1985 comments: 'It is a classic example of how Barclays views its place in South African society, as part of the existing economic and social system.'

all called for direct links in the form of visits to South Africa in support of particular struggles.

The most important result of direct contact — as of all forms of solidarity action — is the boost for the morale of black workers in South Africa when they learn of it. With all the power of the repressive state apparatus backing the employers with whom they are in dispute, it is invaluable to workers there to know that they are not alone and that they have informed and willing allies on their side. There is no better way of achieving this morale-boosting effect than by dealing directly with the workers themselves who are locked in struggle.

It is this factor more than any other which leads us to support the South African unions' call for direct links in the form of visits by overseas unionists to the scene of the struggles in South Africa.

Direct links also break through barriers of ignorance and apathy inside the British trade union movement on international questions. They enable trade unionists here to see for themselves the people and organisations which they are being asked to support: to learn at first hand the conditions under which black workers in South Africa are forced to live by their employers and the state; to find out for themselves the real background to industrial disputes and to know exactly and quickly what kind of solidarity is sought by the independent unions when they are in dispute.

Such considerations are crucial when managements counter pressure by British trade unionists by saying that this pressure is jeopardising the 'progress' of talks with South African unions, or claiming that the dispute in question is an 'inter-union' dispute.

Useful

It is also crucial given the complexity of the South African trade union situation and the need of trade unionists here to find out which unions are bona fide representatives of the workers. The building of direct links at all levels helps to counter the insularity of ordinary trade union members just as it helps to counter the limits on solidarity imposed by top levels of the TUC.

Direct links are not a miracle cure for the problems of solidarity. Rather, they provide a basis upon which it is much easier to build a whole range of further solidarity actions.

Workers in Britain can put pressure on companies denying black workers their rights by raising the issue in their negotiations and by registering, if the company refuses to concede, a formal dispute with it. Even when these quite small actions are taken, the effect of such pressure can be very significant.

Letters of protest to management, messages of support to unions, material and fraternal aid to unions in dispute in South Africa, coordination with unions involved in other overseas subsidiaries of the parent company, sympathetic strike action and boycott of goods to and from South Africa are some of the actions open to British trade unions.

Strike action and union boycotts, of course, demand a high level of commitment from UK unions. They are often called for by the situation but smaller levels of activity are also useful.

Are there dangers? The TUC has multiple links with South African unions, but its tendency has been to keep them within bureaucratic limits and to use them to restrict the most progressive aspects of South African trade unionism.

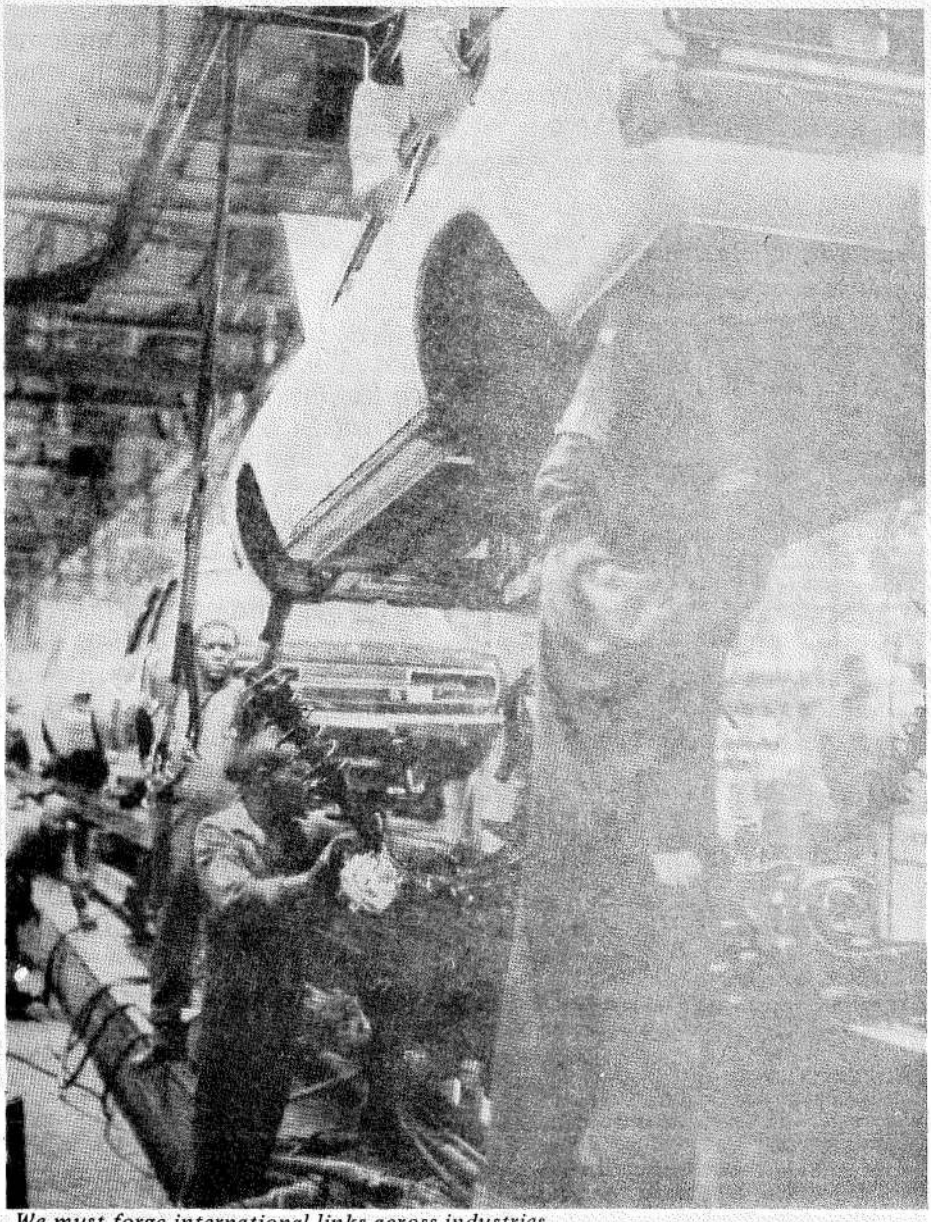
For a period during the 1970s the TUC International Department, to its shame, maintained support of the racist TUCSA unions and sometimes appeared to block initiatives from independent unions, particularly when TUCSA 'parallels' and independents were in conflict with each other.

More recently the TUC International Department has rectified this stance, but it still falls short of providing solidarity on the lines sought by the unions.

Many independent South African unions have links with international labour organistions like the ICFTU (which deals directly with national trade union centres like the TUC International Department) or like the International Trade Secretariats (ITSs which link unions in particular industries like chemicals, metals or food). These organisations have performed an ambivalent role: at times useful — especially in the case of the ITSs — and at times passive or even oppositional.

A classic example of the unconstructive side of their policies was the planned visit of Bill Sirs and Terry Duffy, general secretaries respectively of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and of the AUEW, to South Africa in 1981. Sirs and Duffy said that they had been invited black unions inside South Africa. But what emerged was that the invitation came from the British section of the International Metalworkers' Federation, who had not consulted its non-racial, South African affiliates. The first these heard about the visit was when it was reported in the press in the UK.

Sirs' idea of the purpose of the visit had



We must forge international links across industries

Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ) is the 46.5% owner of the giant Rossing uranium mine in Namibia, and also has substantial interests in South Africa itself.

The following organisations still have shares in RTZ:

Lewisham Borough Council;
Liverpool Council Social Services;
Central Regional Council (Scotland).
Oxford University.
York University and York University Pension Fund.
Durham University.

(Information from 'RTZ Uncovered', published by Partizans, 218 Liverpool Rd., London N1).



Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn arrested outside South Africa House. Photo: Paul Mattesson.

nothing in common with what the IMF's non-racial affiliates wanted. Sirs declared: "We have black affiliates who desperately need our assistance. The objective is to pull them out of the dark ages and provide the sort of training shop stewards have here".

This patronising attitude demonstrates vividly how important it is that the IMF be answerable to its independent affiliates and that its contacts be set up only in collaboration with these unions. Although the IMF FOSATU affiliates were opposed to this particular trip, they expressed themselves unequivocally in favour of direct contacts, provided that they are guided by the interests and requirements of workers.

The South African metalworkers' unions stated:

"The independent non-racial IMF affiliates in South Africa found it very difficult to support the proposed visit because of the statements made by Sirs before the visit. The unions felt his statements to be insulting and ill-informed when he spoke of bringing black workers out of the "dark ages". These IMF affiliates made their views known to the IMF secretariat in Geneva. The visit was subsequently called off.

"The three IMF affiliates believe that their principles on fraternal contact between unions are clear. We strongly favour fraternal contact between workers in South Africa and workers in other countries, at all levels, provided this is guided by the interests and requirements of workers.

"Visits to South Africa and visits overseas should be based on the concrete needs of workers.

"Visits should involve not only top officials, but also plant-based worker representatives.

"The aims of these visits should be to strengthen fraternal ties between organised workers in different countries and to carry forward the struggle for workers in South Africa to win the same rights as have been won by workers in other countries.

"Several visits to and from other unions have already taken place, with shop stewards and union officials from Europe visiting unions and factories in South Africa and shop stewards and officials from our unions travelling to Europe and the USA. This contact has been valuable and will be encouraged in the future, provided it takes place in accordance with the above principles and guidelines".

The ANC, SACTU and the Anti-Apartheid Movement have, however, opposed direct links.

SACTU and the Anti-Apartheid executive combined in defeating moves in Anti-Apartheid in support of direct union-to-union links, in the 1981 AGM. Their major argument is that such visits constitute a violation of their policy of boycotting South Africa.

Boycott

But it is — or should be — quite clear that boycott of South Africa refers to the apartheid regime and the economic forces which prop and profit from it: not to the black workers' organisations which are fighting back. Indeed it is the regime which is attempting to isolate the non-racial unions.

SACTU and the Anti-Apartheid's executive say that "black workers themselves have consistently called for the isolation of South Africa". But non-racial unions are an authentic voice of black workers and it is clear that many are now calling for direct links. They do not want to isolate themselves.

An official SACTU representative in the UK declared his opposition to direct links in December 1981's AA News. He said that "once in a while the regime will resort to guile by allowing in a person who is not going to be of much benefit to the workers in South Africa or will — wittingly or unwittingly — serve the regime's interests." In other words the only links he sees as possible are those countenanced by the state.

He ignores the strength of the trade unions — inside the country and out — to develop contacts of use to themselves, and assumes that the state will only allow in and out of the country individuals friendly to apartheid.

Consider a situation in which a solidarity delegation is sent over. If the state lets them in, well and good; if it refuses, it would provide good propaganda material for solidarity work and encouragement to black workers. Either way, black workers in question would receive a boost to their morale knowing that they are not isolated.

The apartheid state would *like* to stop all progressive links; indeed it would *like* to crush the whole union movement. But whether it can remains open to question. It has not succeeded so far. Moreover, support for direct links increases pressure on the state's ability to restrict visits. Our aim is to make life more difficult for the state machinery, not voluntarily accept their controls.

Anti-Apartheid and SACTU do not of course advocate that non-racial unions in South Africa should be isolated or

ADDRESSES:
NUM: PO Box 10928, Johannesburg 2000 (Tel: 011-29-4561).
Emergency South Africa Strike Fund, Anti-Apartheid: 13 Mandela St., London NW1.
FOSATU: 2 Goodhope St., 7530 Bellville South, Cape. (Tel: 021-951412).
CUSA: 7th Floor, Lekton House, 5 Wanderers St., Johannesburg 2001. (Tel: 011-23-8302).

deprived of support. What they say is that British trade unions should channel all their support through SACTU, that SACTU has an extensive underground network in South Africa and has "perfected its methods of making contact".

They further argue that most trade unionists are "organising in semi-legal or clandestine conditions" and that the establishment of direct links can "jeopardise these trade unionists' work". In other words, rather than form direct contact with other non-racial unions in South Africa, trade unions should place all their support — moral and financial — behind SACTU.

It is not true that non-racial unions in South Africa work in 'semi-legal or clandestine conditions'. While it is true that they are semi-legal bodies, nevertheless they openly organise black workers.

They see their openness as a crucial aspect of their strength as trade unions; for it enables them to bring together the mass of workers in a particular industry or area in a way which would be impossible for an underground organisation. It also enables them to maintain a far higher level of democratic discussion among the membership than is ever possible in a tightly-knit underground group.

Whatever the advantages of underground organisation, many of the non-racial unions do not feel it is appropriate for *trade unions*, except as a last resort.

Many of the non-racial unions consider it adventurist to work with an organisation like SACTU which is underground and for all practical purposes illegal. This is particularly the case with respect to international links. When it is possible for non-racial unions to forge direct links with overseas unions, it clearly increases rather than diminishes the risks to mediate these links through an underground organisation.

There is danger in all non-racial trade unionism in South Africa; but SACTU's claim that the exchange of visits can 'provoke further harassment' is a risk many of the non-racial trade unions consider worth taking and have taken, consistently for the last ten years in some cases, and seems minimal compared to the risks of involvement with SACTU.

Lastly, there are enormous advantages in direct links in their own right. Rather than attempting to mediate contact through overstretched lines of communication, officials, shop stewards and ordinary workers will be able to exchange experiences directly and build support on

For over a year, eleven workers at Dunnes stores in O'Connell Street, Dublin, have been on strike in protest at apartheid.

In July 1984 Mary Manning was suspended for implementing the policy of her union, the Irish Distributive and Allied Trades Union, for a boycott of South African goods. After refusing to handle South African grapefruit, she was suspended indefinitely. Ten full-time work-mates [and initially, two casuals] walked out in her support.

Dunnes management have drafted in part-time scab labour to beat the strike and to beat the union. But the strikers have fought on.

The strike has focused attention in Ireland on apartheid and has pointed the way forward to building solidarity with South African workers. It has, rightly, become an international cause celebre, too.

The strikers and the company chair, were invited to go to Soweto last month to see apartheid for themselves. Ben Dunne Jr turned down the offer; but the strikers agreed to accept the invitation from Desmond Tutu. In the event they were held for eight hours under armed guard in Johannesburg and then flown back.

One of the strikers, Theresa Mooney, told the Guardian [July 23] of her feelings and summed up the enormous value of the experience.

"We said from the beginning we didn't come out as martyrs for South African blacks. We were just following union directives. We didn't know much. But now we know more. And when, if, we go back, we won't take the same shit as before. This hasn't just taught us about South Africa, it's taught us a lot about how the system operates here."



Black strikers, Durban 1973

this basis. Such links are especially useful when speedy and effective support is called for during industrial disputes.

Behind the ANC/AAM/CP opposition to direct links is an attempt to maintain a political monopoly and to marginalise the independent voice of black workers — to substitute the ANC's perspective of diplomatic pressure plus guerilla warfare for an international solidarity of a distinctly working class type.

So we should support direct links. But arguments on this issue should not overshadow the other solidarity work that can be done. And specific solidarity with workers' struggles in South Africa must go together with, rather than replacing, more general solidarity with the whole liberation movement.

Demonstrations, lobbies and pickets are as important for South Africa as they were for Vietnam. The Anti-Apartheid Movement also stresses four other forms of activity: disinvestment; getting people and organisations to withdraw business from Barclays Bank, whose South African subsidiary is the biggest bank there; stopping sporting links; and pressing for government economic sanctions.

These activities are limited, and cannot substitute for working class forms of solidarity. Investors who are withdrawing from South Africa do so out of concern for their profits, not moral pressure. If the big capitalist governments impose sanctions, they will do so only in a crisis and in order to get a solution tailored to their interests.

Crucial

Nevertheless, the movement in South Africa, including the non-racial trade unions, has supported these forms of solidarity. And even if their immediate effects are limited, some of them can be extremely useful for building awareness.

Not everyone is a trade unionist working in a company with subsidiaries in South Africa, or handling South African trade. Everyone has a local Barclays Bank, and many people have local councils, colleges, or trade unions which may bank at Barclays or have investments in companies heavily involved in South Africa or Namibia.

No-one needs to subscribe to a whole theory about bringing down apartheid by diplomatic and consumer pressure in order to make the moral gesture of withdrawing an account from Barclays or selling shares in RTZ or ICI.

Any Labour Party Young Socialists branch, Labour Party, or college Labour Club, can organise a picket at its local Barclays and use it to get across the facts and the arguments about apartheid.

In that way we can build a mass solidarity movement — and lay the basis for the more decisive form of support for the black resistance in South Africa, through trade union boycotts of South African trade.



A victim of the Soweto massacre. Photo: IDAF.

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