

Smash Apartheid Through Workers Revolution Permanent Revolution & Black Labor in South Africa

The development of powerful trade unions rooted in South Africa's black proletariat is one of the brightest chapters in the recent history of the international working class. Nowhere on earth have workers struggled against more desperate conditions or faced a more powerful, intransigent opponent. In the face of a fiercely racist state, armed to the teeth and supported by the overwhelming bulk of the privileged white population, black workers in the apartheid hell-hole have organized themselves into one of the most powerful trade-union movements in history and wrested a series of concessions from the white rulers. Their struggle has inspired workers and the oppressed around the world.

While the hated system of apartheid privilege remains intact, the continuing struggles against it—which have assumed an increasingly proletarian axis over the past decade—are living proof of the revolutionary capacity of the working class. The battle to uproot the entire system of apartheid is inextricably connected to the struggle for workers power in the industrial dynamo of sub-Saharan Africa. Contrary to the hopes of the “liberal” imperialists and South African capitalists, the apartheid system cannot be peacefully reformed—it must be smashed along with the whole social system of capitalist exploitation which produced it.

The centrality of the fight for workers power in the struggle to end apartheid—the perspective of permanent revolution—is one which is as yet fully understood by only a tiny minority of those involved in the movement. At the same time, in answering the concrete problems posed in this battle, the most advanced sections of the black workers movement have embraced aspects of this perspective. The lessons of the struggle to date, and their connection to the historical necessity to forge a Bolshevik party to lead the black proletariat and its allies in the struggle to smash the South African bourgeoisie and establish a black-centered workers government, is the subject of the following article, which is based on a public talk given last fall in both the Bay Area and Toronto by Bolshevik Tendency spokesperson Gerald Smith.

In June 1988, the black workers of South Africa staged a three-day general strike that shook apartheid capitalism to its foundations. Despite the fact that such actions are forbidden under the state-of-emergency regulations that are still in force, nearly two million workers stayed away from work, supported by tens of thousands of students. The strike was called to protest the banning of 17 anti-apartheid organizations, the closing down of

various newspapers critical of the racist regime, and proposed anti-trade union legislation.

This defiant mobilization marked a new high point in the development of the organization and consciousness of the black workers, and demonstrated that they have not been cowed into submission. Despite the bannings, the beatings, imprisonment and murder, the black-based trade unions in South Africa are still fighting, and winning substantial gains.

This massive display of the power of organized labor had a sobering effect on the apartheid regime. Immediately after the strike, manpower minister du Plessis agreed to negotiate the Labour Relations Amendment Bill with the unions. This was a real, though limited, victory. It signaled that the non-racial unions have the strength to force the white rulers to back down.

The growth and development of the black trade-union movement has been conditioned by the nature of the apartheid system itself. Apartheid literally means *apart*-ness or *separate*-ness. It has been the policy of the National Party since it came to power in 1948 and is codified by a complex web of 317 laws, such as the Racial Classification Act, the Bantu Education Act, the Separate Amenities Act, the Factories Act, and various others.

Apartheid has its material basis in the super-exploitation of black labor. Historically, black workers have received as little as one-sixteenth of the wages of their white counterparts. The differential goes to the South African capitalists. Obviously if South African mine owners can get away with paying their workers only a fraction of the wages paid by their international competitors, while selling their product at the world price, their profits are going to be above average, or *super* profits. One of the key things to understand about South Africa is that the struggle against apartheid is *necessarily* linked to the struggle against capitalism.

The liberal section of the South African capitalist class would like to do away with some of the most bizarre features of apartheid. But all the reforms which they advocate, like those implemented by the Botha regime during the past few years, are intended to preserve the system of economic exploitation which lies at the core of the hated apartheid system. The few cosmetic reforms offered to date have only fueled the anger of the struggling black masses because they have changed nothing—except whetting their appetite for real social justice.

Simultaneously, the National Party is under fire from its own base. Hardline supporters of apartheid, such as the Conservative Party and the neo-nazi Afrikaner Re-

sistance Movement (AWB), are opposed to any and all concessions. To maintain this delicate balance is far more difficult than it may seem.

Permanent Revolution: Program for Liberation

One of the ironies of apartheid is that the superprofits gouged out of the black workers in the past few decades have led to significant economic expansion, which in turn has produced a parallel growth in the strength of the black proletariat. But, contrary to liberal capitalist theorizing, the development of this capitalist economy has not significantly eroded apartheid. Many militants refer to South African capitalism as “racial capitalism.” This is because the extreme form of racial oppression imposed upon the black masses is inextricably bound up with the entire structure of South African capitalism. Apartheid capitalism cannot be reformed—it has to be *smashed*, through the revolutionary struggle of its victims.

But if the workers and insurgent black masses manage to make a revolution, and succeed in smashing the state which safeguards this bestial system of racist piracy, why should they then hand power back over to a section of the white capitalist class and a thin layer of privileged black hangers-on? Why shouldn't they organize this powerful industrial economy in such a way that it benefits the people whose sweat and blood have created the fabulous wealth that is presently monopolized by the “randlords”? In other words, why shouldn't they establish a workers government which can proceed to create an egalitarian, socialist society?

This may seem elementary for socialists. But supporters of the largest supposedly-socialist organization in South Africa, the Communist Party (SACP), who play a very influential role in the African National Congress (ANC)—the main anti-apartheid organization—pursue a different strategy entirely. They think that South African capitalism can be reformed, and they therefore seek an alliance with a section of the apartheid capitalists. Their willingness to appease the ruling class has been exposed through their meetings with the Anglo-American Corporation (the biggest single exploiter of black labor in the country) and various liberal Afrikaner oppositionists outside the country. When Edward Kennedy, a representative of one of America's twin parties of racism, imperialism and war, visited South Africa a few years ago, these people and their supporters in the United Democratic Front (UDF), held a demonstration to welcome him! In an interview with the London *Observer*, Joe Slovo, one of the leaders of the SACP, said: “I believe transition in South Africa is going to come through negotiation...If there were any prospect of settling it peacefully tomorrow, we would be the first to say let's do it.”

What kind of negotiated settlement do you think the South African working masses could make with their executioners? It could only be an agreement to let a few ANC representatives in some kind of coalition government share responsibility for the continuation of the system of capitalist exploitation presided over by the

white ruling class. It is unthinkable that the South African bourgeoisie would make the kind of concessions which were made a decade ago in Zimbabwe—yet for the average black worker or peasant in Zimbabwe, the replacement of Ian Smith by Robert Mugabe has changed very little in their conditions of life.

The politics of the ANC can only lead the black masses into a blind alley. The ANC's basic program is the Freedom Charter, which says, “the people shall govern.” But who are “the people”? And how will they “govern”? One left-wing South African trade-union militant, Moses Mayekiso, said this about the Freedom Charter:

“The [ANC's] charter is a capitalist document. We need a workers' charter that will say clearly who will control the farms, presently owned by the capitalists, who will control the factories, the mines and so on. There must be a change of the whole society.

“Through the shop-steward councils people are opposed to this idea that there will be two stages toward liberation: that we must clean up capitalism first, then socialism. It's a waste of time, a waste of energy and a waste of people's blood.

“Apartheid is just an appendage, a branch of the whole thing....”

—*Socialist Worker Review*, October 1985

In criticizing the program of the ANC, we do not disparage the courage and dedication of the thousands of active members of the South African Communist Party, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) or the ANC. All of these organizations have fought against apartheid and many of their militants have lost their lives in the struggle. We have no doubt that the future Socialist Republic of Southern Africa will honor the memory of these heroic militants. Nevertheless, personal courage cannot substitute for a correct program, which in turn can only be derived from a clear perception of reality. Ever since the victory of the Stalinist political counterrevolution in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, Stalinism has corrupted the thinking of would-be revolutionaries the world over.

South African capitalism provides a powerful vindication of Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. In this epoch, the epoch of imperialist decay, the international capitalist system as a whole is in decline. It has outlived its usefulness. The capitalist class has no historically progressive role to play anywhere in the world, and the most elementary tasks of the bourgeois revolution (the distribution of land to the tillers, the creation of a democratically-elected constituent assembly on the basis of universal suffrage, and national liberation) can only be solved by the victory of the proletariat in its struggle for social emancipation.

The Centrality of the Working Class

When the struggle was restricted to the residential townships, it was not much of a threat to South African capitalism. In fact, the townships were *designed* for repression. So when the “comrades” (as the youthful black anti-apartheid militants in the townships are known), and the students, protested, their power was very limited. Not so the working class. When the workers staged

the “stayaways” last May and June, nothing moved in South Africa. This was a demonstration of the social power which, combined with objective interest, gives the working class the capacity to uproot bourgeois society and lead humanity into the socialist future.

While the unions have a vital role to play, communists are not trade-union fetishists. We view the trade unions as mass workers organizations that can be transformed into instruments for working-class liberation, but they are not ends in themselves. Today the most significant social struggles that are taking place in South Africa are being led by the trade unions. The task of revolutionaries in South Africa is to build the new trade unions while organizing the most advanced workers within them into groupings based on a class-struggle program which goes beyond the issues posed in the workplace and poses clearly the necessity for a social revolution to create a black-centered workers government to carry out the socialist expropriation of apartheid capitalism. This is the historical role of the Leninist vanguard party. It must win to its banner the rapidly growing militant, class-conscious elements within the unions. Only such a party, deeply rooted in the black proletariat, will be capable of providing the political leadership, and ultimately the technical coordination, required to shatter the apartheid colossus. A tightly-disciplined, democratic-centralist organization is indispensable if the oppressed masses are to triumph over the brutal terrorism of the apartheid regime.

There is a real difference between a party of the Bolshevik type and a union. A Bolshevik organization is a cadre organization which is open only to those who understand and agree with the revolutionary program, and who are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to carry it out. In contrast, trade unions are mass organizations in which the members necessarily possess diverse political opinions. They have to be built from the bottom up as grassroots organizations, based on strong shop-floor structures. The existence of a strong shop-steward system means direct union representation on the shop floor. It functions as an essential link between the top leadership and the rank-and-file at the point of production. It also serves as a training ground for the development of worker-leaders. A union without an effective steward system is like a car without a transmission.

The History of Trade Unionism in South Africa

From its inception, the South African union movement has been deformed by the scourge of racism. Initially, blacks were totally excluded from skilled jobs and from joining the all-white unions. The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of South Africa (ICU), founded in 1919 in Capetown, was the first nationwide African workers organization and political movement. Led by Clements Kadalie, the ICU grew rapidly as the result of a very successful dock strike which in 1920 won wage increases of nearly 100 percent for workers on the Capetown docks. By 1927, at its peak, the ICU had 100,000 members and had branches across the country, especially in rural Natal and the eastern Transvaal.

The ICU was what is called a *general* union. Anyone

could join and many of its members were not actually employed. Unions are best organized along industrial lines so that all the workers in a given industry are represented by a single union. This gives them more power. But because the black workers in South Africa were without any kind of legal or political rights, there was a tendency to combine politics with trade unionism at a very early stage, which led to increased repression on the part of the South African regime.

In 1941 the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) was formed through the merger of several small black unions led by the Communist Party. Demand for labor was high in South Africa after the depression, and the CNETU grew to some 150,000 members. It was a very militant union and in 1942-43 it succeeded for the first time in organizing black mine workers. However, it was bedeviled by disputes over the role of the SACP. After the crushing of the mine workers strike in 1946, the secession of 22 affiliates in 1947, and the banning of the SACP in 1950, the CNETU split up in 1953.

In March 1955, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was founded in Johannesburg by a variety of leftist trade unionists, including remnants of the CNETU, and individuals purged from the Trades and Labour Council (either for protesting the exclusion of blacks or under the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act). SACTU declared its intent to combine the organization of industrial unions with the political struggle against apartheid. It grew from 20,000 members in 1956 to 46,000 three years later. It joined the Congress Alliance in 1955 and took part in the Congress of the People, which promulgated the Freedom Charter. In 1962, 160 SACTU leaders were arrested and charged under a new Sabotage Act. SACTU's heavy dependence on Communist Party cadres, and a consequent lack of organizational depth, meant that the intensified repression aimed at the SACP forced SACTU underground by the mid-1960s.

As one observer noted:

“None of the African union movements before the 1970s endured because none could turn worker support into a permanent source of power. In each union generation, workers surrendered their power—whether to charismatic leaders, the law, registered TUCSA unions or non-workers who sought to lead resistance to apartheid.”

—Steve Freidman, *Building Tomorrow Today*

Origins of the New Union Movement

After the suppression of SACTU, the labor movement went into a period of relative quiescence for about a decade. This began to change in January 1973, when 2,000 workers in a brickworks won a sizeable wage increase after a short strike. This sparked a strike in the Frame Group, South Africa's largest textile enterprise. By the end of the month, 6,000 workers were out. In the next two months more than 60,000 workers had been involved in a variety of strikes in the Durban area.

The 1973 strikes suggested to both South African and foreign-owned firms that it was in their interests to make some concessions to black workers and to consider legalizing the unions rather than face continuing and unpredictable production interruptions. Things did not

change overnight—in 1974 and 1976 there were several waves of repression which resulted in certain union organizers being “banned”—but the apartheid rulers gradually decided to temper the repression of the previous decade with some reforms. The report of Nicholas Wiehahn’s Commission of Inquiry into Labour Legislation, released on May Day 1979, marked a turning point. Set up in 1977 in the wake of the 1976 Soweto uprising, the Wiehahn Commission recommended that black workers be allowed to form their own unions and that industrial courts be set up to settle industrial disputes.

The commission also allowed African unions to take part in the industrial councils, on the condition that they register. This caused considerable controversy among the African unions, and many rejected registration with the government and participation in the proposed councils. SACTU, from exile, argued that registration was a “betrayal,” a position which contributed to its isolation from the new union movement. Many of these unions adopted a tactic of registering and attempting to use the legal opening to their advantage, while continuing to organize strong shopfloor representation at the base. In 1979, a federation of some of the new unions was launched, the independent Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). Originally including some 35,000 members, FOSATU tripled its size in the next four years.

The labor relation reforms of the South African government were designed to create the illusion of change, while establishing control over the black unions, with the aim of safeguarding the status quo. But they did present certain limited opportunities. In 1980, for example, the Metal and Allied Workers’ Union (MAWU) applied for registration as a non-racial union. The government issued MAWU a registration certificate, but only for organizing African workers. The union was able to have it overturned in the Natal Supreme Court, which had the effect of undermining the whole notion of racial registration.

Some FOSATU affiliates registered and some did not. But they all attempted to coordinate industrial action, and emphasized the building of industrial unions rather than general unions. FOSATU’s priority was to consolidate itself organizationally and win negotiation rights, something which its predecessors had largely failed to do. As a result, the FOSATU unions grew into strong, industrially-based unions which were able to win some strikes and make real gains for their members.

SACTU and the New Union Movement

SACTU’s and the SACP’s rejection of FOSATU’s tactics in part resulted from their erroneous conception of the South African state as simply “fascist.” This is a left-sounding cover for a right-wing theory of seeking a bloc with the “progressive” elements among the white bourgeoisie. In fact, an extremely circumscribed and grotesquely distorted form of bourgeois democracy exists in South Africa which FOSATU affiliates were able to take advantage of. SACTU’s antagonism to FOSATU also stemmed from simple organizational jealousy and a tendency on the part of the Stalinists to be hostile to

organizations which they do not control. SACTU showed this same attitude toward the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) which was founded in 1980 as a loose federation of ten unions politically aligned with the Black Consciousness Movement.

In a brazen attempt to ensure that contact between South African workers organizations and unionists from other countries ran exclusively through itself and the ANC, SACTU actually agitated *against* workers sanctions and fraternal links between South African and British trade unions. When a debate broke out in the British anti-apartheid movement concerning the relationship between the unions of these two countries:

“SACTU entered the debate with an article in the April 1982 issue of *Workers’ Unity* entitled ‘Direct Links Stink!’—claiming that visits to South Africa by unions were objectionable since ‘they do us no good and put our organisation in jeopardy’. Similarly visits from South African unions to the UK or USA were unnecessary since the independent unions ‘...don’t need lessons in class collaboration’. Most tellingly the article attacked direct links as an attempt to by-pass what it termed ‘the peoples’ revolutionary organisations, the ANC(SA) and SACTU’.”

—*Power!*

FOSATU refused to affiliate with the UDF, which is ANC-influenced, or the National Forum Committee (NFC), which is linked with the Black Consciousness Movement. It did so on the grounds that these two organizations were multi-class formations, not working-class organizations, and that in any case there was no mandate from the membership, which included workers from across a wide spectrum of political sympathies. FOSATU did work with the UDF on particular issues, for example, the 1984 Transvaal “stayaway” to protest the police occupation of the townships.

Because trade unions are rudimentary proletarian united fronts organized around the defense of the workers living standards, controversial political programs or organizations should never be adhered to unless the members are in agreement. Otherwise, the stage is set for acrimonious internal feuds, or worse, organizational ruptures. Workers are not recruited to the unions on the basis of the program of a political party but rather because of the need to band together to defend themselves against the employers. That is why the traditions of workers democracy, i.e., the practice of allowing all political groups (excluding the sworn enemies of the workers) to freely express their views and compete for the loyalty of the workers within the unions, has been historically proven to be the best way of ensuring the organizational unity of the workers organizations.

In late 1985, South African trade unions held a conference in Durban to launch the super-federation Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU). This new federation, founded on the basis of democratic, non-racial industrial unionism, represented some 500,000 workers. The principals in the merger were FOSATU and the unions which supported the UDF. In addition, there were a number of unions which were neither in FOSATU nor pro-UDF, the most important of which was the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) which was affiliated to CUSA before breaking away in August of 1985. CUSA and the black-nationalist AZACTU

(Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions) chose not to join COSATU because there was no principle affirming the necessity for a black leadership. Under pressure from their members who desired unity, these two merged to become the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU).

Vigilantes: Apartheid's Black Guardians

The enormous growth of the black unions, and their demonstrated ability to paralyze production, has been met by a counterattack on the part of the capitalists. The South African bourgeoisie felt that it could no longer rely solely on its police and armed forces. To supplement the "legal" means of repression, they have undertaken the promotion of a vigilante movement whose aim is the destruction of the unions and the anti-apartheid movement. The South African vigilante gangs became active in most areas in late 1985. They specifically target anti-apartheid and trade-union leaders and have operated with the blessing of the regime. In some cases, direct links between the vigilantes and the police have been uncovered.

The bourgeois media refers to the vigilante attacks as "black-on-black" violence in a deliberate attempt to conceal the actual pattern of attacks on the leadership of the trade unions and anti-apartheid organizations, and the links between these extra-legal bands of thugs and their apartheid masters. What we are seeing in South Africa today is a peek into the future for the workers in any country where the class struggle reaches a comparable level of intensity. The "vigilantes" are essentially the equivalent of fascist gangs employed in other countries. In the Philippines, for example, reactionary vigilantes are being recruited to take on the insurgent guerrillas. In the U.S. we have the Ku Klux Klan, the "White Aryan Resistance," the "New Order," "Aryan Brotherhood," "Aryan Nations," and assorted other fascist formations.

South African society is in a prolonged and deep political crisis, the intensity of which is felt by all who live there. In search of a way out of this crisis, the apartheid rulers have consciously attempted to create a cooperative stratum within the non-white population. This has included the forced removal and incorporation of many non-white communities into the phony "homelands," each with its own tiny but relatively privileged elite. This is supplemented by the creation of bogus "community councils," which are neither economically solvent nor independent. In general they have been boycotted by the overwhelming majority of the non-white population.

You might wonder why a regime armed to the teeth, with overwhelming military superiority over a civilian opposition, needs vigilantes in the first place. The police and the army are limited by the difficulty they encounter in getting reliable informers—it seems that the "necklacings" (executions of suspected apartheid collaborators) cut into their ranks considerably. The official state apparatus is also hampered in its ability to wreak the wholesale terror and murder necessary to destroy the mass organizations by a desire to maintain a facade of "legality." Besides, the armed intervention of the regime

against the anti-apartheid movement is somewhat counterproductive in that, short of a wholesale bloodbath, it tends to encourage political solidarity among the oppressed.

No amount of physical force can create support for puppet community councils or administer the townships. The vigilantes have proven more effective in damaging the trade unions and resistance organizations. Unlike the indiscriminate violence that takes place when the police "visit" the non-white communities in their armed personnel carriers, vigilante terror zeroes in on the leaders of the resistance.

Why the Vigilantes Have Grown

The simplistic argument that the vigilantes are state-inspired is not sufficient, in spite of the blatant involvement of the state, because it leaves unanswered the mass base of the vigilantes. Where they have been successful, the vigilantes have fed off the tensions and divisions within the black community. These divisions have been both created and carefully nurtured by the apartheid system. For instance, a black resident of a township who possesses South African citizenship is relatively better off than a black migrant worker forced to live in a hostel.

The anxiety felt by the non-white population as a result of the deep crisis of South African society is politically exploited by the vigilantes. The slogan of "restoring law and order," which serves as a cover for vigilante lawlessness, plays on widespread distress caused by the social dislocations of the apartheid system. There have been understandable objections within the community to some of the methods that the young "comrades" (as the anti-apartheid militants are known) have used to enforce discipline. The means used to get Crossroads residents to maintain the consumer boycott of white shops:

"included making returning residents eat their purchases including detergents, soap, raw meat, etc. It was frequently alleged that suspects were not given an opportunity to explain how they had come by the goods and even that the goods were stolen by the youths manning roadblocks in the Transvaal. Local leaders frequently had to threaten the youths and often distanced themselves from the 'thugs operating in our name'."

—*Apartheid's Private Army*

The same account reports that:

"The fighting and violence which erupted in New Crossroads and KTC in late 1985 can be traced to a number of issues. These include: the death of a community councillor, Mr. Siqaza, in New Crossroads, who was hacked to death with pangas and burnt on Christmas Eve; growing dissatisfaction within the Cape's black communities with the way in which the consumer boycott, schools boycott and Black Christmas [a ban on the celebration of Christmas enforced by the "comrades"] had been organized and handled by individuals and organizations associated with the UDF; tensions and divisions over the 'people's courts' which existed in a number of areas...."

The justice meted out by these "people's courts" was sometimes gruesome:

"One such case, of three women who were given approximately 100 lashes and treated eventually at the nearby health clinic, received a lot of local publicity and created

deep tensions between sectors of the youth, older residents and women in Nyanga East.”

—*Ibid.*

If “liberation” by the “comrades” means public floggings, it is not difficult to comprehend why, in some cases, the vigilantes have been able to garner mass support.

The fight to defeat the vigilantes requires, first of all, a political struggle to develop the appropriate methods to isolate the vigilantes and mobilize the maximum support from the mass organizations of the working class to act in their own self-interest. This requires a commitment to the principles of workers democracy, and confidence in the ability of the masses of the oppressed to act in their own self-interest. The “comrades” lack such a perspective. As Baruch Hirson, an old South African Trotskyist, remarked:

“Despite undoubted sacrifices their use of lynch law is unacceptable. Assassinations do not make a revolution and inevitably rebounds on the community. It also becomes indiscriminate and has led to the death of innocent bystanders, including trade union organisers in the western Cape. The vicious methods employed by the army and the police makes it difficult to condemn the comrades, who are only returning the violence to which they were subjected. Yet, their methods have not always differed from that of the gangsters who prey on the inhabitants of the locations, and their policies and methods can immobilise rather than lead to significant political responses by the community or the working class. Their methods of physical violence against opponents within the townships cannot substitute for the action of the majority of the population (even if they had community support in some of their ‘necklacing’).”

—*Azania Worker*, August 1987

Moses Mayekiso and the Alexandra Action Committee—A Positive Example

Youth in the township of Alexandra, north of Johannesburg, under the leadership of the Alexandra Action Committee, employed radically different methods from those of the “comrades” of New Crossroads. In Alexandra, during 1985, democratically-organized street committees were carefully built on a block-by-block basis. The chairman of the Alexandra Action Committee was Moses Mayekiso, a prominent member of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), one of the most left-wing unions in FOSATU.

Mayekiso is an example of the very best of the new layer of militant working-class leaders created by the explosion of the black unions. He began work at Toyota in 1976, and soon became a union steward. By 1979, he was a full-time organizer for MAWU and helped consolidate the shop-steward structures around which the union has grown. Mayekiso played a leading role in the Transvaal “stayaways” in 1984. As MAWU’s Transvaal Organizing Secretary, he was arrested by South African authorities in early 1986, prompting a protest work stoppage on March 5th of that year.

In June 1986, after being elected General Secretary of MAWU, Mayekiso was again arrested, and is currently on trial for “treason” to the apartheid state. When MAWU fused with several other unions to form the

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), Mayekiso was unanimously elected General Secretary, even though he had at that point been in detention for almost a year. In April 1987, 60,000 engineering workers staged three work stoppages to protest the imprisonment of their elected leader. Over the past several years, we of the Bolshevik Tendency, along with many others in the left and workers movement, have been involved in an international campaign to win Mayekiso’s release.

The street committees in Alexandra Township were linked directly to the organized working class and constituted proto-soviet formations. This was clearly demonstrated when they took over the administration of the townships during the “Six Day War” between the residents of Alexandra and the South African Defense Force in February 1986. The “people’s courts” set up by the Alexandra street committees functioned in an exemplary manner. According to a report in the Johannesburg *Sunday Star*, the residents of Alexandra had praised the “comrades” for eliminating rapes, murders, etc., and “freely express[ed] gratitude for what they see as their sterling work.”

COSATU was not yet a year old when the new federation was forced to advocate working-class defense. Every time a trade-union leader is abducted or murdered with impunity, it not only deprives the workers of an important asset, but it also emboldens the vigilantes. It is imperative that the vigilantes be dealt a series of military defeats to inspire the workers and oppressed, and simultaneously humiliate apartheid’s “private army” in the eyes of their would-be supporters.

There is widespread fear of the vigilantes, yet the uncontrolled activity of the “comrades” in many areas has fueled a backlash that allowed the reactionary vigilantes a limited popular base. The democratically-controlled street committees established in Alexandra were models of the kind of mass organizations that can become the center of the anti-apartheid struggle. Such street committees, in alliance with the black unions, can become the organizational basis for the creation of workers defense guards on a mass scale to rid the townships of vigilante terror. If the masses are not conscious of their own aims, or feel they are denied any real input, they will eventually become demoralized. Workers democracy has played a vital role in the growth of the black unions to date, and it will play an equally important one in the revolutionary struggles of the future.

For a Trotskyist Party in South Africa!

The black proletariat of South Africa has shown both the desire and the capacity to take on the capitalists. But as yet it lacks a political leadership equal to the historic task of uprooting the system which is the source of its oppression. Such a leadership, while posing the struggle for power in class terms, must *combine* the socialist tasks with the democratic ones. This means championing the fight for one person, one vote; fighting for the abolition of all apartheid legislation, and conducting an all-sided struggle against the pathological social legacy of apartheid.

A revolutionary party in South Africa must set as its goal the creation of a black-centered workers state. But, it must also be capable of winning the allegiance of Asian workers, the so-called “coloureds,” as well as progressive elements among the whites, who, precisely because of the racist nature of the apartheid state, can play a military/technical role as a “fifth column” out of proportion to their numbers. Only a party based on the black workers movement, which has assimilated the lessons of the international communist movement of this century, and which stands in programmatic opposition to the utopian class-collaborationist scenarios of both the ANC and the black consciousness movement, will be able to provide the leadership necessary to destroy

apartheid capitalism.

The development of a militant, powerful and democratic workers movement in this citadel of racist oppression is an inspiration to workers and the oppressed all over the world. Yet a successful struggle to topple the apartheid regime depends on forging a general staff—a Leninist vanguard party—rooted in the advanced detachments of the black proletariat and armed with the program of *permanent revolution*, the program of uncompromising opposition to *all* wings of the exploiters. The victory of the South African masses will not only open the road to the socialist reconstruction of all of Southern Africa; it will also give a powerful impetus to the struggle for social liberation internationally. ■