

# *From Apartheid to Neo-Apartheid*

# The Struggle for South Africa

The growing frustration of South Africa's black working class with Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) government was clearly shown last August, when hundreds of thousands of workers participated in a series of one-day rolling strikes protesting the government's "reform" of the labor code. The ANC wants to extend working hours, shorten maternity leave and give the labor minister the right to exempt employers from adhering to minimum labor standards. This is part of the government's attempt to demonstrate to international capital that the "New South Africa" is open for business.

During the struggle against apartheid, the ANC employed plenty of "revolutionary" rhetoric, echoes of which still occasionally find their way into materials produced for popular consumption. But left rhetoric is a luxury that the ANC in government can ill afford, as Mandela explained after his return from his 1996 state visit to Germany:

"we need an investor-friendly environment. If we want the support of the leading financial houses of the world, we need to measure our public statements very carefully. It was right for us to make militant statements when we were fighting apartheid, but now that has changed and we need to measure what we say."

—*Business Report*, 2 June 1996

Mandela and other former liberation fighters have traded their jail cells for stately homes, cabinet seats and executive salaries. It is easy enough for them to abandon talk of social transformation in favor of doubletalk about the common interests of apartheid's privileged elites and its victims. But for the millions of blacks who still live in shacks and squatter camps, who eke out an existence as migrant laborers, and whose lives are scarred by unemployment, homelessness, poverty, disease and hunger, life under the ANC is hardly better than it was under the white-supremacist National Party.

The ANC campaigned for election in 1994 on the basis of a "Reconstruction and Development Program" (RDP), which promised massive expansion in housing, employment and social services, as well as the redistribution of almost a third of the country's farmland. All this was supposed to be achieved while adhering to "strict and efficient monetary and fiscal policies." But, after winning the election, the ANC announced that it lacked the resources to deliver on its promises. One promise the ANC has not tried to renege on is repayment of the \$18 billion in foreign commercial bank debt run up by its apartheid predecessors.

The RDP has been replaced with the "Growth, Employment and Redistribution" (GEAR) program, based on the neo-liberal "structural adjustment" formulas promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Advertised as a means of creating economic growth, GEAR focuses on increasing "competitiveness" through depressing wages, reducing social expenditures, lowering tariffs, and tailoring domestic economic activity to fit the requirements of the imperialist world order. These policies have naturally alienated much of the ANC's plebeian base, but they have been warmly received by imperialist financiers. The IMF's 1995 annual assessment praised the ANC's "extraordinary" accomplishments in redirecting economic

discussion from talk of nationalization and expansion of social services to the need for "fiscal discipline" and reducing the public sector.

## From Apartheid to Neo-Apartheid

There have been important changes in South Africa over the past decade: the legal edifice of official racism has been abolished, universal suffrage has been introduced, and the former leaders of the main black resistance organization today head the government. While neither the social order, nor the state apparatus which protects it, has changed fundamentally, the ANC's election did radically change the attitude of the black masses toward the government.

The ANC was propelled into office through its ability to harness the discontent of the black masses (i.e., to make South Africa "ungovernable"). It promised revolutionary social change and radical redistribution of wealth. But it is today the chief agency for demobilizing the mass struggles it once sought to lead, and, with the passage of time, the gulf between the aspirations of the black masses and the program of the ANC is growing. In Mandela's address at the opening of parliament in February 1995, he called for "raising the levels of discipline and responsible action throughout the society," and criticized the "culture of entitlement" of those blacks who expected the ANC to deliver housing, schools, jobs and health care. In particular Mandela attacked those who advocate continuing mass political struggle:

"Mass action of any kind will not create resources that the government does not have and would only serve to subvert the capacity of government to serve the people."

He denounced popular expectations that "the government must promptly deliver whatever it is that we demand" and criticized those who were "refusing to meet their obligations such as rent and service payments" and others who were engaging in the "forcible occupation of houses." But he expressed no such concern about the forcible occupation and expropriation of black farmlands by whites throughout South Africa's history.

While ANC publicists still talk about "common national interests," and make occasional rhetorical references to the "National Democratic Revolution," the government's insistence on subordinating social need to the dictates of the market tells a different tale. Similar "structural adjustment programs" imposed by the IMF in other countries have raised prices for food and other basic goods, lowered prices for luxury goods, accelerated environmental degradation, and reduced spending on education, health, housing and other social services, while simultaneously reducing jobs and wages. Under the ANC's GEAR program, 126,000 new jobs were supposed to be created in 1996, but instead 170,000 were lost (*Business Report*, 4 September 1997).

The ANC leadership accumulated an enormous amount of political authority through long decades of struggle against apartheid; it is this authority which has permitted them to go as far as they have in attacking the interests of their base. Mandela is committed to transforming South Africa into an "ordinary" capitalist society, but South Africa is no ordinary society, and the ANC's attempts to safeguard

the gross inequalities created under apartheid must inevitably lead to social explosions.

While the millions of impoverished blacks will not forever endure their present condition, the South African bourgeoisie is also unhappy with the status quo. The price of gold, their most important export commodity, has fallen. They cannot compensate by exporting manufactured goods because industrial productivity lags far behind that of the advanced capitalist world, while labor costs are significantly higher than in export-oriented Third World countries like Indonesia, the Philippines or Mexico. The ANC's goal of making South Africa more competitive internationally requires it to tame the black unions.

### **ANC/SACP/COSATU: 'Tripartite Alliance' Against Black Workers**

One reason the ANC has felt free to attack its base is that its left flank is protected by its "Tripartite Alliance" with COSATU (the Congress of South African Trade Unions) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). While increasingly critical of Mandela's prostration before the IMF and World Bank, COSATU and the SACP (both of which are nominally pro-socialist) accept the notion that South Africa must undergo a protracted period of capitalist development.

The ANC's neo-liberal policies pose serious problems for the leadership of COSATU and the SACP. Unlike the ANC, they are rooted in the working class and their influence, and even existence, ultimately depends on their ability to defend the interests of their base. Yet the effect of their alliance with the ANC, which is today nothing other than an agency of South African capitalism, is to chain the workers' movement to the exploiters. Every time its Alliance partners complain, the ANC reminds them that, having agreed to take the path of reform and "power sharing" with the white bourgeoisie, they must accept responsibility for the consequences.

In embracing the ANC, COSATU accepted the framework of "co-management" of the economy with the bosses. But for all the talk of democratization, the only "gain" that most workers have seen is a few senior management posts for former liberation fighters whose assignment it is to convince the workers that, in the "New South Africa," it is their duty to work more for less. The ANC has employed a variety of tactics to curtail union power, from demagogic denunciations of unionized workers as "labor aristocrats," to attempts to substitute arbitration and mediation for militant job actions.

COSATU's leadership initially accepted ANC restrictions on the right to strike and went along with legislation designed to bureaucratize industrial relations. But the latest round of ANC labor "reforms" are being met with more serious resistance from the rank and file. But this resistance is being held within the bounds of continuing overall support to the ANC by the leadership of COSATU and the SACP.

As a means of pressuring the ANC, and containing leftist dissidents, COSATU and the SACP sometimes float the idea of a workers' party. But more often they issue warnings to their base that a break with the ANC would risk isolation, and could lead to a rapid move to the right by the government. Yet the pressure is growing—as the massive response to COSATU's August "rolling strikes" indicates—and the ANC is gradually expending its political capital.

South Africa remains one of the few places where socialism is still widely popular. The mass union-centered movement that brought down apartheid aimed at more than formal equality for blacks; the masses believed that theirs was a struggle for social and economic equality as well. These aspirations have receded, but they have not entirely disappeared.

### **The 'Gravy Train'**

Once hailed as the spearhead of the liberation struggle, the black unions are now derided by the ANC and its hangers-on as saboteurs whose "inflexibility" threatens foreign investment and the balance of payments, and whose defense of "high" wages accounts for the massive levels of unemployment. Black capitalists, on the other hand, who were widely despised as collaborators with the regime during the struggles of the 1980s, are today held up by the ANC as role models.

The only beneficiaries of "redistribution" so far have been members of a thin layer of blacks who have secured high-paid positions in the big corporations and civil service. While blacks still constitute a tiny minority of the bourgeoisie, the election of the ANC led to a rapid expansion in the number of black faces in corporate boardrooms. An affirmative action survey conducted in late 1995 by FSA-Contact reported that the percentage of blacks in senior positions had grown from 2.5 to 9.5 in the preceding year, while the percentage of whites had dropped from 95 to 87.

Many top ANC cadres, black union leaders and key figures in civic organizations have managed to hop on the neo-apartheid gravy train:

"A survey by Perry and Associates in 1994 on the attitudes towards affirmative action in 65 of South Africa's top companies is very revealing about the thinking of white executives: the most sought after category of black people were 'those with Robben Island [the apartheid prison where Mandela and other anti-apartheid fighters were held] credentials.'

"It is not hard to find two good illustrations. Fikile Bam, a director of Volkswagen SA, the First National Bank, the Iron and Steel Corporation (Isacor), the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the Armaments Corporation of South Africa (Armcor), not only worked in the law firm owned by Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela in the late 1950s, but was sentenced to ten years on Robben Island in 1964 for his political activities. Eric Molobi, chairman of Kagiso Trust Investments and director of several companies, also spent time on Robben Island...."

—D.J. Randall, "Prospects for the Development of a Black Business Class in South Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, October 1996

Gaby Magomola, deputy chair of Afrilink and a former political prisoner, explained that "the white partner brings in capital in the form of money, we bring in political capital." Magomola explained what he meant by that "political capital":

"a lot of the people that we served time with on Robben Island are now ministers, they are premiers, they are cabinet ministers, and we have that direct link. There is no way I can call Tokyo Sexwale [Premier of Gauteng Province] and he will not respond to me, because we slept side by side in bed in prison and he understands my views, and he has a moral obligation to ensure that black business is empowered."

—*Ibid.*

Steven Biko's wife, Mamphela Ramphele, was taken on

as a director of the giant Anglo American mining conglomerate. Cyril Ramaphosa, who formerly headed the powerful National Union of Mineworkers, and then the ANC, is one of four men who controls New Africa Investments, "the emblem of black economic empowerment." According to a report in the 24 January 1997 *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, "these four men, who have effective control over the black empowerment giant, are together worth a staggering R150-million." There are also reports of other union leaders who have used their positions to line their pockets:

"Former left critic of the ANC, trade union leader John Copelyn, earned almost R1 million in royalties in 1994 on the basis of the legal business undertakings of 'his' textile workers union. A 'regular' trade union full-timer would have earned less than R50,000 in the same period."

—*International Viewpoint*, 15 May 1995

### ANC In Office, But Not In Power

Under the "power sharing" arrangement negotiated with the apartheid rulers, the ANC is permitted to hold office, on condition that it preserves the social hierarchy created by apartheid. As a token of its good faith, the ANC agreed that the bureaucrats who enforced and administered the white supremacist system could either keep their jobs or accept generous "sunset clause" buyouts. Unlike the broken promises of land, jobs and housing for the millions of apartheid's victims, Mandela's government has scrupulously honored its commitments to those who operated the mechanisms of apartheid.

The fragility of the present political arrangement, and the limits of the ANC's writ, were graphically illustrated recently during the hearings of its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a body set up to appease popular anger through publicizing some of the crimes committed under apartheid. In the interests of "reconciliation," the perpetrators are promised immunity from prosecution in exchange for their testimony, provided they make full disclosure.

When F.W. de Klerk, the last president under apartheid, testified on 14 May 1997, he cynically claimed to be "shocked" to learn that the apartheid security services had tortured and murdered anti-apartheid fighters. He brazenly denied that the National Party (which had ruled South Africa since apartheid was instituted in 1948) had ever authorized the use of either murder or torture in combatting the liberation movements during the decades it held power. This was too much for Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the moderate cleric who chairs the commission. Tutu said that he could simply not believe that each of the 1,200 individual acts of torture reported to the commission had all been carried out by "mavericks." Tutu's deputy, Dr. Alex Boraine, observed that the state of emergency imposed by the National Party government to suppress the popular upheavals in the black townships (in the course of which more than 1,000 civilians were killed by the military) had amounted to a "license to kill."

De Klerk responded by accusing Tutu and Boraine of "prejudice," refusing to cooperate further with their commission and launching a court suit. The suit was dropped in September, after Tutu and Boraine, who had initially refused to take back their remarks, bowed to what must have been considerable political pressure from the ANC, and formally apologized to de Klerk for suggesting that he had been less than truthful. The humiliating capitulation by the ANC to this arrogant racist (with whom Mandela shared the Nobel peace prize in October 1993) reveals a

great deal about who is actually in charge in South Africa today.

### Apartheid's Army & the ANC

The key to the deal between the ruling class and the ANC was the guarantee that the white-supremacist repressive apparatus remain intact:

"The SANDF [South African National Defense Force] is supposed to be a phoenix, born from the ashes of seven different military forces. In actual fact, the former Homeland armies...as well as the guerrilla forces of the ANC's *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), the military wing of the Pan Africanist Congress, are welded onto the existing structures of the old SADF....Although former guerrillas must be evaluated and trained before [being] placed on active duty, SADF members undergo no such process. Despite the appointment of ex-MK commanders to the posts of Minister and Deputy Minister of Defence, and the new army's recruitment of ex-MK officers, the SANDF remains a formal, conventional military dominated by an experienced corps of Afrikaners."

—Gary Kynoch, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, July 1996

In the military, as in parliament, the ANC's role is to provide black frontmen for the maintenance of the status quo. Kynoch quotes Joe Modise, the ANC defense minister as asking "What's the point of prosperity if you can't protect it?...You need the guns to create the conditions to have houses." In fact the only reason the ANC "needs the guns" of the apartheid military is to protect it from the black masses, who are increasingly restive over the government's failure to deliver on its promises.

Given that South Africa does not face any obvious external military threat, and that the ANC has complained loud and long about its lack of financial resources, the government has had problems explaining why the armed forces should continue to be allocated a big chunk of the national budget. But the SACP/ANC leaders have come up with a rationale: the "danger" of more blacks flooding into the country!

"Kasrils, a former MK commander, noted in 1995 that the SANDF had exclusive responsibility for the security of the land borders, and warned that 'the consequences of an unchecked migration into South Africa would be disastrous'."

—*Ibid.*

A socialist government in South Africa would welcome immigrants, just as the Bolsheviks did in Russia, and seek to use them as a human bridge to spread the influence of the revolution internationally. But for the bourgeois nationalists of the ANC, and their social-chauvinist allies in the SACP, who are ideologically committed to pushing the fantasy of a non-exploitative, non-racist capitalist South Africa, "illegal" immigrants are convenient scapegoats.

### Black Labor: Apartheid's Achilles Heel

The cycle of political struggle that culminated in the 1994 elections that put the ANC in office can be traced back to the early 1960s, when the anti-apartheid movement had been crushed by massive state repression following the March 1960 Sharpeville massacre. The ANC/SACP, and their black nationalist rivals in the Pan-Africanist Congress, were banned, their unions crushed and their leaders jailed, driven underground or forced into exile. While the

ANC/SACP (and to a lesser extent the PAC) retained the passive loyalty of the black masses, its cadres were unable to shape developments on the ground, and they were forced to exist for decades as essentially emigré movements.

But by the late 1960s, a growing economy and expanding markets required South African capital to expand the pool of skilled labor beyond the white workers for whom such positions had been traditionally reserved under apartheid. By the early 1970s the racially segmented labor market—where white labor was traditionally paid up to ten times as much as black—came into increasingly sharp conflict with the requirements of South African capitalists. The white minority, which totals only 13 percent of the population, was increasingly concentrated in the repressive apparatus and the corporate and government bureaucracies, and the demand for black labor increased. This laid the basis for the emergence of new black unions, often initiated by the organizing efforts of radicalized students, many of whom were white or Indian.

A successful strike in 1973 by 100,000 workers in Durban caught the apartheid regime by surprise and succeeded in winning important concessions. This action announced the arrival of a powerful new trade-union movement, which would ultimately rock the apartheid regime to its foundations. Two years later, the crushing defeat of the South African army in Angola by a largely black Cuban expeditionary force provided an important catalyst for the 1976 black student-based Soweto uprising, an event which heralded the onset of a cycle of black resistance that ultimately put Mandela in the presidency.

The apartheid regime responded to the township revolt with bloody repression, but unlike in the early 1960s, its room for maneuver was limited by the increased dependence of South African capital on black labor. The attempt to crush the revolts touched off an escalating wave of popular anger, which spilled over into the factories and encouraged the growth of the new black unions.

The new unions did not set out to confront the regime politically, but instead concentrated on building their strength at the point of production. Their activity was centered on wringing concessions in wages and working conditions from individual employers. This proved an effective tactic. Unable to suppress the new black unions, the regime was compelled in 1979 to grant them a circumscribed legality.

### Apartheid Endangers Capital

The apartheid state was a trusted pillar of the anti-Soviet “Free World,” but, in the late 1970s, some of the more farsighted elements among the imperialists were becoming alarmed by the long-term implications of the emergence of a powerful workers’ movement, and growing leftist influence among black youth. By the early 1980s, the political uncertainty was visibly undermining economic prospects, as both foreign and domestic capital worried about the long-term stability of the apartheid regime. A 1981 report by the blue-ribbon Study Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Southern Africa, chaired by the head of the Ford Foundation, concluded:

“Whatever the South African government does to reinforce the status quo, black forces inside the country will eventually alter it.

“The active collaboration of the South African government, whatever its ideology, is *not* an important factor in protecting the Cape sea route. A greater source of danger

to the West is the growth of Soviet influence in the region, promoted by white intransigence in South Africa, growing political instability, rising levels of racial violence, and armed conflict.”

—*Time Running Out*

By the mid-1980s, even the Afrikaner elite’s secret society, the *Broederbond*, had reached similar conclusions. In an internal circular, it advised that:

“the exclusion of effective black sharing in political processes at the highest level is a threat to the survival of the white man, which cannot be countered by maintaining the status quo or by a further consolidation of power in white hands.”

—“Basic Political Values for the Survival of the Afrikaner,” quoted in *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 September 1991

### ANC/SACP vs. Black ‘Workerists’

Many of the key cadres of the new union movement (particularly in FOSATU—Federation of South African Trade Unions) were consciously pro-socialist and sharply critical of the ANC’s utopian/reformist goal of replacing apartheid with a non-racialist capitalist society. The ANC/SACP, which had played no role in building the new unions, reciprocated by deriding their focus on independent working-class interests as “workerism.”

In the keynote address to the 1982 FOSATU Congress (which was adopted as official union policy) General Secretary Joe Foster warned that subordinating class independence to “establishing unity across a wide front” was a:

“great strategic error that will weaken if not destroy worker organisation both now and in the future....

“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.”

—quoted in *Power!*, 1984

The ANC’s record in office provides a powerful confirmation of Foster’s 1982 prediction. Yet, despite their leftist impulses, the “workerists” were not able to generalize programmatically from their important political insights. Thus in the same speech warning that the petty-bourgeois nationalists in the ANC would “in the end...turn against their worker supporters,” Foster came out in support of Poland’s counterrevolutionary *Solidarnosc*, which he naively insisted, “was not struggling to restore capitalism in Poland” but rather “to establish more democratic worker control over *their* socialist society.” Without a comprehensive revolutionary political program to counterpose to the ANC’s class collaborationism, the FOSATU leadership conceded the terrain of “politics” to the ANC, while attempting to safeguard working-class interests through militant unionism on the shop floor:

“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. In such a situation mass mobilisation is essential so as to challenge the legitimacy of the state both internally and internationally.

“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.”

The experience of the black workers’ movement in South Africa proves exactly the contrary: petty-bourgeois nation-

alist formations like the ANC will always turn on the working class once they come to power. This is why Marxists struggle to establish proletarian leadership in the fight against every form of social oppression. This cannot be done on the basis of narrow syndicalism, but only through the fight for a program which transcends narrow sectional working-class interests, and champions the interests of all the oppressed.

### Primacy of Politics: How ANC/SACP Triumphed Over 'Workerists'

The 1982 FOSATU congress passed a motion calling for launching a "workers' party." But without a nucleus of class-conscious militants who understood the urgency of forging a party to compete directly with the ANC/SACP for the allegiance of the workers and black masses in the townships, and a program to address the burning questions of the hour, this motion represented nothing more than an expression of abstract preference. For all their talk of a "workers' party" and "socialism," the leftists in the unions centered their activity on the shop floor, and left the broader political struggles against apartheid to the ANC/SACP by default. This abdication was raised to the level of principle by those "autonomists" who advanced the view that the best way to push the anti-capitalist struggle forward was to keep the workers' organizations aloof from all political affiliations.

This abstentionism facilitated the ANC/SACP's drive to recruit shop stewards and gradually extend their control over the independent workers' movement. Using pseudo-Marxist terminology, the SACP denounced the left unionists as "workerists," "ultra-lefts" and "splitters" and insisted that the working-class movement must be subordinated to the ANC as the leadership of the struggle for national liberation. At the same time, the ANC/SACP began to present a more radical face by talking about "uninterrupted revolution," the necessity to struggle for "popular power" and even "insurrection."

The 1984-85 township revolts were designed by the ANC/SACP to make the country "ungovernable." The ANC organized a series of "stay-aways" centered in the black townships and enforced by bands of militant young "comrades." This tactic, which shifted the axis of struggle from the workplace to the amorphous community, succeeded largely because of the abdication of the black unions. In suppressing the mass struggles, the regime killed at least a thousand people and jailed thousands more. But the upheavals established the ANC as the undisputed leadership of the movement against apartheid, and tipped the scales in favor of the section of the white ruling class that recognized that the rigid system of legalized apartheid had to be abandoned in favor of a more normal (i.e., informally racist) form of capitalist rule.

Without a revolutionary programmatic alternative to the ANC's populism, the leftists in FOSATU's leadership drifted to the right. In 1985 FOSATU joined with pro-ANC unions and the powerful but politically conservative Mineworkers to create COSATU, the country's largest and most important trade-union center. While representing a step forward organizationally, the fusion was premised on the at least tacit acceptance of the leading political role of the ANC/SACP.

In 1987 COSATU's national congress formally endorsed the ANC's Freedom Charter. The union left, including Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of the National Union

of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), registered their misgivings by putting forward a "workers' charter," spelling out workers' rights under a future "peoples' [i.e., ANC] government." As political negotiations between the ANC and the government gained momentum, the limits of the syndicalist shop-floor focus became increasingly clear. COSATU's "workerist" wing, swept up by the wave of enthusiasm and hope among their base, came under enormous pressure to get involved in the process in order to influence the outcome. Unable to offer a coherent political alternative, the "workerists" felt compelled to choose between abstention and political support to the ANC/SACP.

When it was legalized in 1990 (in the midst of the collapse of the Soviet bloc), the SACP turned toward a more openly social-democratic brand of reformism and sought to present itself as a tolerant, broad left party of the whole class, within which all shades of leftist opinion could find a home. This proved attractive to Mayekiso and many other former "workerists," who joined the party with which they had engaged in bitter polemics only a few years earlier. The absorption of the leading workerists provided the SACP with an important lever for integrating the unions into the project of stabilizing "post-apartheid" South Africa. The SACP offered some self-criticisms of its previous sectarianism toward the workerists, and promised to abjure such Stalinist behavior in future, but the important political concessions were made by formerly independent union leftists, who abandoned all notions of working-class independence and socialism, and reconciled themselves to the prospect of a capitalist South Africa, administered by the ANC.

### Background to the Deal

The apartheid rulers had been compelled to seek a negotiated settlement by the continuing mass popular resistance, both organized and spontaneous, which animated the black masses in the factories, mines and townships, and paralyzed the South African economy. The terminal crisis of the Soviet bloc, which removed the ANC's chief international patron, was also a factor. Where the ANC, like other Third World leftist/nationalist movements, had previously been able to maneuver between the imperialists and the "socialist world," they were now forced to go it alone, or settle for the best terms they could get from the "Free World."

In his account of the negotiations between the ANC and the de Klerk government, Allister Sparks notes that the Soviet collapse:

"eased Pretoria's phobia that the black struggle against apartheid was a conspiracy directed from Moscow. It took the monkey off De Klerk's back and enabled him to justify to his people what would otherwise have appeared to them a suicidal course of action."

—*Tomorrow is Another Country*, 1995

The Afrikaner rulers had no intention of committing suicide and, while they recognized that things had to change, they still had a strong hand to play. Prior to the opening of formal negotiations, the apartheid regime had already conducted years of secret, exploratory talks with Nelson Mandela, and extended other feelers to the ANC. At a 1986 conference organized by the Ford Foundation in New York, Thabo Mbeki, the ANC's director of information (and today South Africa's first deputy president), met with Pieter de Lange, chairman of the *Broederbond*. According to Mbeki de Lange told him:

"Look, we Afrikaners thought we needed many things to

secure our future: segregated living areas, no mixed marriages, and all that....But the reality is that we can remove the Group Areas Act tomorrow and it's not going to make any difference, because your people don't have the money to move into the expensive white suburbs. So from your point of view it will be a meaningless change, but for us Afrikaners it will mean we will wake up one day and realize that nothing has changed, that we are still all right....That will open the way to asking the question: Why do we need a white government anyway?"

—*Ibid.*

Another important line of communication with the ANC was established by Willem ("Wimpie") de Klerk, whose brother, F.W.—then a senior cabinet minister in the government of P.W. Botha—was soon to take over as president. Wimpie reported back to his brother and to the *Broederbond*: "The essence of my message was, 'Look, boys, everything is OK. We can do business with the ANC. They are not that radical. They are willing to negotiate. They are willing to compromise. They see the Afrikaners as an indigenous part of the South African population. They are not that dangerous. There's a flexibility even in their economic outlook'."

—*Ibid.*

The ANC has indeed proved to be "flexible." To allay the fears of the mining conglomerates, they hastily dropped the most radical-sounding demands in the 1955 Freedom Charter including the call for "mineral wealth beneath the soil" to be "transferred to ownership of the people as a whole." Mandela pledged allegiance to the future of South African capitalism and reminded the business press that he had never been an advocate of socialism.

### SACP: Capitalist Tool

The ANC's Communist Party partners in the liberation struggle used to talk of a revolution in two stages—first the overthrow of apartheid and then, after the establishment of a non-racial democracy, the opening of a struggle for workers' power and socialism. Today the SACP has more than 50 members of parliament elected as part of the ANC slate. It counts ministers, deputy ministers and provincial premiers among its members. But far from talking about any second, socialist "stage," the SACP is solely concerned with making South African capitalism more competitive.

The ANC has assigned its left-wing allies the task of attacking their own base. One of Mandela's earliest appointments was to make the late Joe Slovo (the central SACP leader) minister of housing. During the 1984-86 rebellion in the townships, the ANC called for a rent strike, which was extended into a refusal to pay property taxes, fees for municipal services, electrical bills, etc. Slovo's first task was to "normalize" rent collection. He also moved promptly to begin removing homeless blacks who, after the ANC was elected, had begun squatting in previously all-white enclaves.

Mandela put former COSATU head, Jay Naidoo, in charge of administering the RDP (which was only adopted in the first place as a sop to the unions), so that he could take responsibility for the government's failure to deliver on its promises. Former SACP guerrilla commander, Ronnie Kasrils, who took over as deputy defense minister, was soon advocating increased funding for the apartheid army. Alec Erwin, the ANC's minister of Trade and Industry, who, as a leading theorist of the union left, had once produced some of the sharpest criticisms of the logic of class collaboration, today argues that economic development can only be fi-

nanced through the massive privatization of state assets.

The ex-Stalinists' lurch to the right has to be understood as a political phenomenon, rather than simply the product of personal corruption. Under the repressive apartheid regime, people risked their lives to join the SACP—it was not a party of time servers and careerists. For six decades, while their party willingly subordinated itself to the petty-bourgeois nationalists in the ANC, the cadres of the Moscow-loyal SACP were able to comfort themselves with the thought that they were fighting on one front of a larger, global struggle between imperialism and the "socialist world." The collapse of the Soviet Union led them to abandon all hope for socialism, and to resign themselves to making South African capitalism work.

In an interview with *International Viewpoint* (15 May 1995), Jeremy Cronin, a prominent SACP representative, explained how the collapse of the USSR transformed the party:

"The existence of two blocks [*sic.*] was central to our concept of national democratic revolution. The disappearance of the Soviet block [*sic.*] raises a lot of unresolved questions....there is no longer a fully fledged second block [*sic.*]—an alternative in terms of trade, aid, military and political assistance."

Cronin concludes that, "the national democratic revolution is likely to be a very long and ongoing project" and suggests that:

"Socialist forces should engage with the present situation, be in the midst of the democratic movement, and champion the advance, the deepening and the defence of the democratic transformation."

For the next historical period, the SACP considers that the "defence of the democratic transformation" is *counterposed* to undertaking any struggle for socialism. Cronin complained that a November 1994 socialist conference hosted by COSATU and the SACP:

"was diverted into a discourse of the deaf by a number of small far-left groupings whose argument was that nothing has changed in South Africa, and that the key task remains 'the overthrow of the bourgeois state'. They're entitled to hold that view, but it is radically different from our own, and it makes useful discussion virtually impossible."

For all the SACP's doubletalk about the "complexities" of economic decision-making and the need to "advance and deepen" the ANC's "democratic breakthrough," it is obvious to everyone that the ANC/IMF's structural adjustment program is widening the gap between the black masses and the predominantly white elite. By openly renouncing socialism and promoting a more robust South African capitalism, the SACP will inevitably come into sharp conflict with the militant layers of black workers who make up the core of its base.

Many SACP militants doubtless remain loyal to their organization because of its heroic history of resistance to apartheid, but it has become so closely identified with the ruling ANC that it is hardly seen as playing an independent role. Its operational structure is reportedly in some disarray, and a section of its leadership is said to favor outright liquidation. This would likely be opposed by the ANC, which has found its Communist Party ally useful both in exercising control over the unions and preventing the emergence of a more radical working-class party.

### Racial Oppression and Class Struggle

The question of social class in South Africa has always been bound up with the question of racial oppression. The bourgeoisie and the core of its repressive apparatus is overwhelmingly white, while the industrial working class is almost entirely black. This has profound implications for the character of the socialist revolution in South Africa, as Leon Trotsky observed more than 60 years ago:

“the South African 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.”

—“On the South African Theses,” 20 April 1935

Trotsky pointed to the relevance of the Russian Revolution in illuminating the relationship of the national and social questions in South Africa and the correct attitude of Marxists toward petty-bourgeois nationalist formations like the ANC:

“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 parties’ of czarist Russia....

“The Bolsheviks have always mercilessly unmasked these parties...their vacillations and adventurism, but especially their ideological lie of being above the class struggle....

“There could be no question of any permanent alliance with them under the banner of ‘anticzarism.’ 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.”

—*Ibid.*

South African revolutionaries must adopt a similarly irreconcilable attitude toward the ANC/SACP government. The South African working class is overwhelmingly black, but it has elements and potential allies in every other community. Beside the Indian and “coloured” (mixed-race) populations, who occupied an intermediate position between the black majority and the white oppressors under apartheid, there are also hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers (from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Namibia and elsewhere) as well as a small, but historically significant anti-racist element in the white population. The apartheid rulers historically sought to exacerbate tensions among the different sectors of the oppressed—while attempting to rekindle tribalist identification among blacks—as part of their strategy of divide and rule.

To become more competitive, South African mine and factory owners want to *lower* the living standards of the black working class. The job of the ANC/SACP is to control,

demobilize, coopt or, if necessary, attack the unions and mass organizations of the oppressed. As the current political configuration begins to unravel, there is a real danger of a resurgence of racial/communist violence, pitting elements of the oppressed against each other, as well as a revival of white supremacist terrorism.

A revolutionary workers’ party in South Africa would seek to function as a “tribune of the people,” in Lenin’s memorable phrase, i.e., to link the struggle against white supremacy and other manifestations of social oppression to the necessity for working-class rule. Against the ANC’s promotion of multi-class “national unity,” a Trotskyist party would counterpose class unity. While necessarily centered in the black working class, a Trotskyist party in South Africa would also champion the interests of the unemployed and homeless in the townships, the farm workers and impoverished masses in the “tribal homelands,” women, immigrants, ethnic, racial and sexual minorities. Rather than limiting the fight to what is possible within the framework of capitalist rule, such a party would combine implacable opposition to all forms of chauvinism with a program of transitional demands to lead the masses to understand the necessity of abolishing the whole system of private property.

### **Break With the ANC— For a Revolutionary Workers’ Party!**

The whole situation in South Africa hinges on the question of the political leadership of the black working class. The most urgent political task is to break the popular-frontist Triple Alliance of the ANC/SACP/COSATU which binds the proletariat to the white capitalists. A key demand in this struggle is for the creation of a *workers’* party to offer a class alternative to the bourgeois ANC and its SACP hangers-on. But such a party cannot be a reformist/electoralist party on the model of the British Labour Party, the Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) or similar social-democratic formations. A revolutionary workers’ party must be committed to the struggle to establish a workers’ government, rooted in the black masses, to carry out the expropriation of the mines, the factories, the banks, transport, agribusiness and all the other productive assets of society. Such a perspective is flatly counterposed to the attempts of the ANC/SACP to administer a progressive profit-driven economy which serves the interests of both the capitalist exploiters and their victims.

The “settlement” worked out between de Klerk and Mandela settled nothing fundamental. The white capitalists still own almost all the productive assets, and are quite willing to launch a “capital strike” to block measures they do not approve of. The bourgeois state machine remains intact, and remains committed to the defense of the wealthy elite. The ANC’s promises of “reconstruction,” “development” and “redistribution” have become a cruel joke. If the workers’ movement is not able to provide some hope for the millions of impoverished blacks in the townships and former “homelands,” the result could be a reactionary resurgence of ethnic/tribal hostilities.

A black-centered workers’ state in South Africa would face enormous economic and military pressure from the “Free World” powers, who stood behind the apartheid butchers. In order to survive it would necessarily have to pursue an aggressively *internationalist* perspective and seek points of support outside the borders of South Africa, both in the region and in the heart of the imperialist metropolis

itself. Just as the struggle launched against apartheid won enormous support internationally in the 1980s, the expropriation of those who profited from decades of legalized racism would similarly inspire many tens of millions of working people around the world—particularly in Africa and in the black diaspora in the U.S., Britain and other imperialist centers.

The repressive apparatus of the South African bourgeoisie has been shaken—the legitimacy of the apartheid rulers

has been undermined, the confidence and cohesion of the white minority has been loosened. The organized black workers' movement remains objectively powerful. While the core of the armed forces and the police remains intact, these forces are considerably less homogenous than they were a decade ago. A socialist revolution in South Africa is entirely possible, and it is also the *only* way in which the legacy of apartheid can be uprooted. ■