

# International VIEWPOINT

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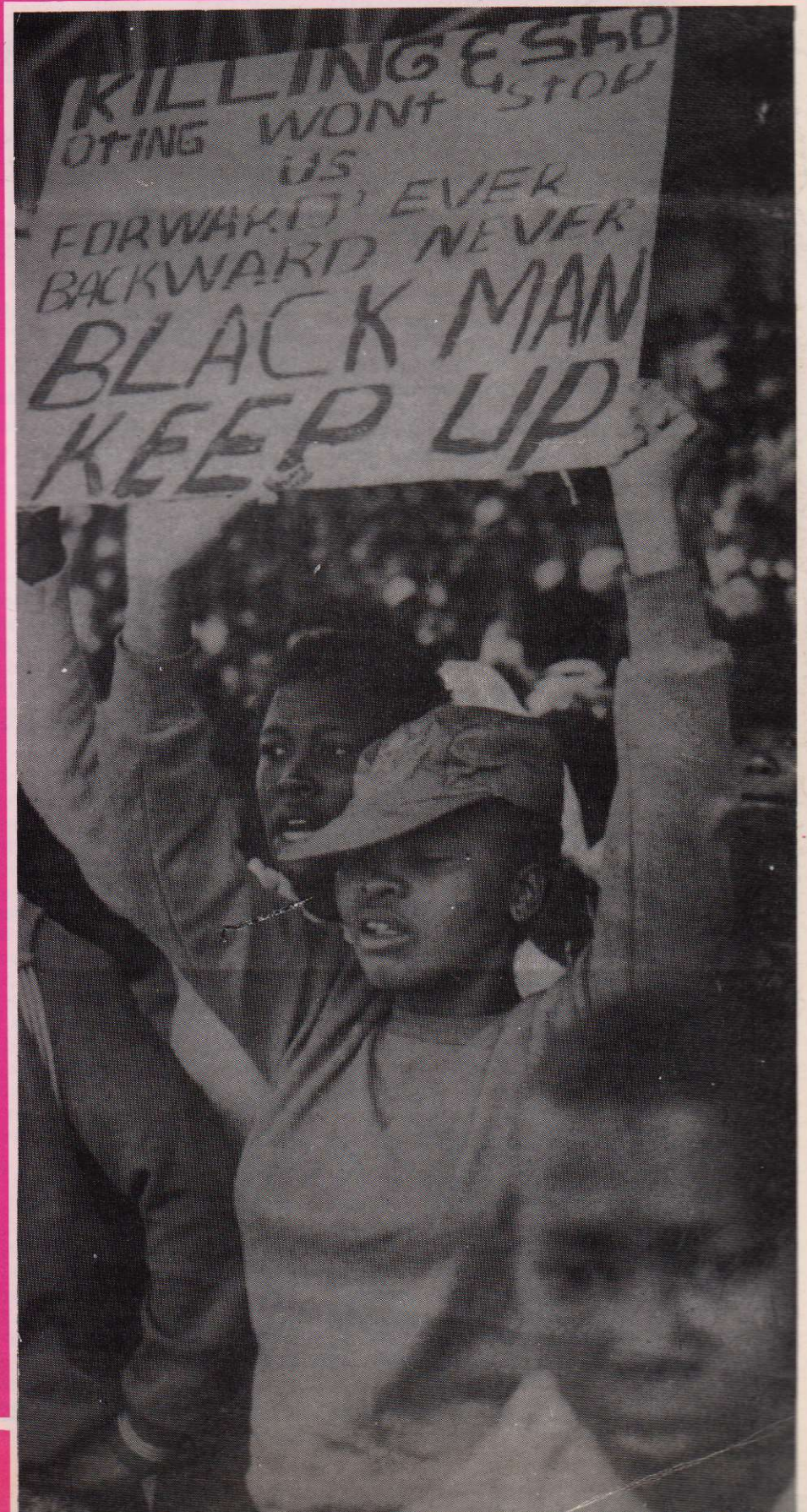
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**Special Issue :**

**South African  
movement  
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**Gorbachov's  
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hunger strike**





# International Viewpoint

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# The first six months of Gorbachov's reign

THE TOP SPOT in the Soviet hierarchy has been occupied by Gorbachov for six months now. He assumed power without any open clashes. He has consolidated it by means of rapid changes in the makeup of the leading bodies of the party, the state, and the armed forces. The youngest leader elevated by the bureaucracy since Stalin's death seems, thus, to have a chance to carry through reforms at least as extensive as those that Nikita Khrushchev sought to implement. Everything indicates that this, in fact, is Mikhail Gorbachov's intention. What is known about him personally also tends to confirm this. Such a view, notably, is supported by Roy Medvedev, who was his fellow student. The limited public opinion that has developed in the Soviet Union in recent years — among a part of the intelligentsia, the technocrats, and the party apparatchiks has tended to come to the same conclusion. In these circles, expectations, hopes for a "thaw," are emerging that have not been seen in the Soviet Union since Khrushchev's death.

ERNEST MANDEL

The expectation that Gorbachov will introduce major reforms has become so accepted that in an open letter the Czechoslovak dissident group Charter 77 contrasted his "desire for reform" favorably with the stand-pat attitude of the Czechoslovak CP leaders. Such subjective impressions are merely the reflection of pressing objective needs. For years, the bills have been adding up for the growing cost the Soviet Union must pay for the rule of the bureaucratic dictatorship. Over the last two years, economic growth rates have steadily fallen. The crisis in agriculture is leading to a disastrous dependence on cereal imports from the Western countries. A serious lag in technological progress has been developing in the field of electronics. An abrupt rise in the mortality rate indicates a crisis of public health. And these are only some of the graver consequences of bureaucratic rigidity for the Soviet society and masses.

"This has got to change" — everyone capable of thinking for himself or herself in the Soviet Union agrees about that. And there are a lot more of them than the likes of Aleksandr Zinoviev, with their myth of the hopelessly conformist "homo sovieticus," would have us believe. For the moment there is no perspective for change initiated from below.

So, the expectations of the intellectuals and technocrats are focused on the hope for change from above.

What the workers think is something no one knows very much about, least of all the party apparatus, which from time to time organizes pathetic "sociological studies in the factories" to gather a few scraps of information. The few first-hand reports that have reached us indicate skepticism or outright hostility.

The burden of these reports can be summed up in the phrase: "Gorbachov — Andropov — more discipline, more belt tightening for the workers." In fact, in a recent speech in Leningrad, Gorbachov himself acknowledged that there was a general skepticism among the masses about the scope and effectiveness of the reforms underway.

It cannot exactly be said that cold water has been poured immediately on these expectations of major reforms. On May 17, 1985, after two sessions of the Soviet CP Central Committee devoted entirely to this subject, measures were adopted "against alcoholism and drunkenness." They were to go into effect on June 1.

Alcoholism is a terrible plague in the Soviet Union. According to a report of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, it affects 40 million people.

Its effects on the economy (absenteeism in the factories) are disastrous, as well as its consequences for public health. It is, no doubt, the major cause of the decline in average life expectancy that has been registered for several years now in the Soviet Union.

Among the industrialized or semi-industrialized countries, a decline in average life expectancy has been seen only in the Soviet Union. Besides alcoholism, the other factors are a delay in putting into use the more modern medicines and a more and more pronounced decline in the quality of the health-care system.

So, the bureaucracy has a clear interest in trying to come up with an answer to these problems. The hefty income that the state derives from the sales of vodka certainly does not compensate for the losses caused by the evil of alcoholism.

The measures adopted are administrative and repressive in nature. They include a ban on serving alcohol in cafes, canteens, and restaurants before 2.00 pm or after 8.00 pm; big price increases for alcoholic beverages, along with increased production of soft drinks and fruit juice; a sharp reduction in the production of vodka in the future; stepped-up repression of moonshiners; and greater penalties for public drunkenness and absenteeism in the plants owing to drunkenness.

The effects of these measures, however, are for the moment modest. The population generally shares the skepticism of *Le Monde's* Moscow correspondent, who wrote in the June 7, 1985, issue of the Paris daily:

"Despite the press campaign that is in full swing, the daily lives of the Soviets have not yet really changed. The screw may go on being tightened. On top of the repressive measures will come the automatic effects of the announced cuts in the annual production of alcohol. But for the moment the old habits remain well rooted, as the magazine *Ogonyok* recounts. One of its readers made the test in a restaurant. He asked for tea. The waiter smiled complicitly and asked: 'Would you like a bottle or a carafe?'"

At the same time, as soon as he assumed power, Gorbachov relaunched the violent repression of corruption and 'economic crimes' that was initiated under Andropov, and which Chernenko had relaxed somewhat. Heads have rolled in the all-union ministries and those of the various republics. The targets for the axe have been managers of enterprises, in particular trading enterprises, and the entrepreneurs and intermediaries in the "parallel markets" (the black and "grey" markets).





Gorbachov with General Jaruzelski before a meeting of the Warsaw Pact countries (DR)

In some cases, the penalties have been draconian. In Rostov-on-the-Don, the manager of a food store was sentenced to death for "large-scale theft of socialist property." Several dozen economic and political administrators in the region have been found guilty of corruption and been sentenced to prison terms up to twenty years in a forced-labor camp.

Among the top officials fired, one notes the minister of electrical energy, the minister of building materials, the minister of higher and secondary education, the minister of steel, the minister of light industry, the minister for the petrochemical industry, and the one for livestock-production machinery. And this is by no means an exhaustive list.

At the top of the hierarchy, 22 of the 121 regional first secretaries of the Soviet CP have been ousted, as well as dozens of local leaders and republic ministers. The word is going around in Moscow (cf. the *Sunday Times* of June 19, 1985 and *Time* of September 9, 1985) that half the members of the Central Committee will be dropped at the next congress of the Soviet CP which is scheduled for the coming February.

There have been five changes in the Presidium (Politbureau) of the Central Committee. Four new members have been put on — Ligachev, Ryzhkov, Ishebrikov, and Shevardnadze — all friends of Gorbachov. One member has been dropped, Romanov, Gorbachov's main rival.

What characterizes all these reforms is that they represent a struggle against the "excesses of the bureaucracy" by typically bureaucratic methods — decrees, administrative measures, repression, punishments.

A crackdown by the state, by

its organs, a crackdown by the police to reinforce discipline — that is Mikhail Gorbachov's political and social philosophy in a nutshell. That's the undiluted philosophy of the bureaucracy.

What this philosophy represents in the first place is the bureaucracy's inability to understand the social nature of the evil that the reforms are supposed to combat. The source of the massive alcoholism is demoralization, lack of social and political perspectives, the lack of social relations that can offer personal fulfillment, the temptation to drown in vodka the hopelessness, boredom, and greyness of daily life.

It is an elementary principle of Marxism that 40 million alcoholics are not just 40 million individual "cases" of psychological problems. They are also 40 million pieces of evidence of a profound social malaise. Don't bother to ask Mr. Gorbachov, his lieutenants, or his ideologues what the nature and roots of this social malaise are.

The all-pervading corruption that afflicts the Soviet Union (to say nothing of East Europe or the People's Republic of China, where it has now come out into the open) is obviously rooted in the survival, consolidation, and extension of commodity production and the influence of money in the society.

Once again, this is the ABC of Marxism. Even the limited commodity production that exists in the Soviet Union reflects a partially private nature of labor and thus the survival of private interest, and a consequent systematic quest for individual advantages.

Of course, no one could demand that this be abolished overnight. It might even prove indispensable to expand momentarily the market and

monetary economy. But no Marxists worthy of the name could close their eyes to the objectively pernicious, disorganizing, and demoralizing effects of the influence of money and the growth of social inequality and egoism in the process of building socialism.

As Lenin wrote in 1918: "You cannot deny the demoralizing influence that high salaries exert on the Soviet regime ... as well as on the working masses." ("The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power.") Still more clearly, he wrote, "Concealing from the masses the fact that attracting bourgeois specialists [this applies still more forcefully to so-called Communist specialists] by offering them very high salaries is a departure from the principles of the Paris Commune would mean stooping to the level of bourgeois politicians and deceiving the masses."

However, the bureaucracy has been concealing all that assiduously from the masses for more than 55 years, that is, ever since Stalin discovered that egalitarianism was not a principle of communism but rather a "petty-bourgeois deviation." The bureaucracy does not act this way out of ignorance or stupidity. Its social interests compel it to do so. The bureaucracy has to justify the material privileges it enjoys. That is why it cannot reveal the source of the corruption and the "economic crimes."

The bureaucracy, thus, has no recourse but to call in its secular arm. But in so doing it only confirms that the evil it claims to be combating is social in nature rather than individual. Marx himself was quite clear on this question:

"Punishment is simply a means for defending society against any violation of the conditions for its existence, regardless of their content. But what sort of a society is it, that has no better instrument for defense than a penal judge? ...

"If, then, crimes are seen in great number and they appear with such frequency and regularity that they appear to be natural phenomena, is it not necessary, instead of hailing judges who remove a part of the criminals simply to make way for new ones, to think seriously about the need for altering the system that produces such crimes?" (From an article in the *New York Daily Tribune* of February 18, 1853).

Every word of this remains valid today. And every word applies to the social reality in the Soviet Union, which has a "prison population" of several millions, as well as to that of the capitalist countries.

Recently a report appeared in the Polish press that in a trial of two youths accused of stealing a pair of



sheets in a home for youth, the prosecutor asked for sentences of ten years in prison. It seems that sheets cannot be found in the stores, and so "decent people" are particularly outraged by such a crime.

Such talk reveals more about the social reality of the Soviet Union and East Europe (1) than a hundred volumes on a "Marxism-Leninism" made unrecognizable by adaptation to the needs and interests of the bureaucracy.

While Mikhail Gorbachov, who clearly lacks neither intelligence nor knowledge, understands this reality to some extent, he has to keep quiet, not for "reasons of state" but because of the interests of the bureaucracy. (2)

On June 11, 1985, speaking to a Central Committee plenum attended by all the high Soviet dignitaries — except his main rival Romanov — Gorbachov delivered a virtual indictment of the state of the Soviet economy. His audience was called upon to understand the need for "radical changes" and to carry them out. Such reform has to be put into practice in all urgency — "We don't have any more time left."

Those who claim that this appeal had "new features," at least in its form (cf. *Le Monde* of June 13, 1985), should be reminded that the formulas are exactly the same as those in Malenkov's reports 32 years ago! That was immediately after the death of Stalin. You can find them as well in the speeches of Kosygin in the second half of the 1960s.

[The second part of this article will analyze the reforms proposed by Gorbachov and the state of the Soviet economy.]

1. This did not prevent General Jaruzelski from coolly telling the French Communist Party paper 'Humanite' (see the June 3, 1985, issue): "Our state assures its citizens more social benefits of a higher quality than the biggest and richest capitalist countries." That's not just bureaucratic pretences, it's a total lack of shame.

2. The following story is going around in Moscow. Gorbachov was invited to a banquet given by high dignitaries of the regime. He asked what the cost of the festivities was. The officials were distinctly unhappy about that and took their time in adding it up but, nonetheless, they finally came up with a figure. Gorbachov divided it by the number of guests and proposed that they ask fifty roubles from each person present.

Now, fifty roubles is a quarter of a worker's monthly wages. The quarter of a worker's wages for one meal for a bureaucrat! Moreover, fifty roubles a month is the entire monthly pension for most of the 51 million retired persons in the USSR. That is a good index of the privileges of the bureaucracy in the country. It is hardly necessary to add that at such a banquet, a lot of the food consumed would be unobtainable for workers, even if they had the money to buy them. As Trotsky wrote, when there is scarcity there has to be a cop to watch the lines in front of the stores, and the cops serve themselves first.

## Walentynowicz leads new protest against the regime

'WHEN THE workers in the Gdansk shipyards began their strike in my defence and against my sacking five years ago, I never imagined that this would be the trigger of a vast historical process. It was not my doing. It is God who made use of me and made me the detonator of the strike. But today, five years later, after the period of Solidarnosc's legal existence, after the state of emergency, and in the middle of a period of repression and political trials, I view the future of Poland with alarm. We live in a difficult period, full of bitterness. Life is especially hard for us women. The standard of living is declining dramatically; shortages are a constant source of worry; the interminable queues are turning our lives into a hell on earth ...'

This was Solidarnosc's Anna Walentynowicz speaking. Here she was attempting to explain why for her, the struggle which she sparked off in August 1980 should not be allowed to die.

ARTHUR WILKINS

She continued: 'I am convinced that this is a period of transition, but it is also a period of great tests of human character. The Polish people as a whole must go through this test of strength. As women we know the value of life and how to safeguard it. We want peaceful reforms which guarantee a better future. It is up to us women to tell the truth about our daily lives and to testify to the way in which the joy and the beauty of life is snatched away from us. We are all worn out by hard work, crushed and consistently harassed. We are ruled by standards that we don't agree with ... For this reason I call on all people of good will and especially women to take up more vigorous activity and to protest against the life which those who rule are imposing on us.'

This demonstrates how Walentynowicz is still a rebel, still devoted to the interests of the working class and at the same time still a devout, even Messianic, Christian. For eight months she has been leading a rotating hunger strike in the church of Biezanow, near Cracow. Formerly a solderer at the Lenin Shipyards and the heroine of August 1980, Walentynowicz always seizes the initiative whenever the movement in Poland is not living up to its responsibilities or is in retreat.

Outside the control of the Solidarnosc structures and preferring to

address herself directly to the masses in order to make them move, Walentynowicz was forced out of the regional leadership of the union by Lech Walesa in the spring of 1981, for her opposition to a policy of compromise with the ruling bureaucracy. Today, also, Walentynowicz's actions are clearly upsetting Solidarnosc leaders in some circles. The almost complete silence surrounding the Biezanow protest in the press run by the underground Solidarnosc leadership appears to testify to this.

In their May 3 bulletin, the Biezanow hunger strikers explained that through their action they were demanding an end to the persecution and imprisonment of people for their beliefs, to physical violence and psychological torture meted out to detainees and an end to the sacking of workers for political reasons. They are protesting against the constant threat of repression coming from the regime and against the drastic lowering of the standard of living, which is destroying the physical health of the people. They are opposed to attacks by the official propaganda machine on the Church and on Christian values. They are demanding that the basic principles of the constitution of the Polish state be respected, especially those which cater for freedom of speech and independence of the judiciary.



The hunger strikers adhere to a document entitled 'Testament of a fighting Poland', of July 1, 1945, which they claim as their political heritage and which they consider as their guide.

This document was the final declaration of the Council of National Unity, a kind of parliament of underground Poland which existed under Nazi occupation and which was dominated by the socialist and populist left. It was also the political leadership of the Resistance. Adopted at the beginning of the Stalinist era the Testament demanded an end to the USSR's domination over Poland; and free elections open to all democratic parties, and establishing a system along the following lines:

— For full territorial and socio-economic self-management, as well as for self management in education and culture.

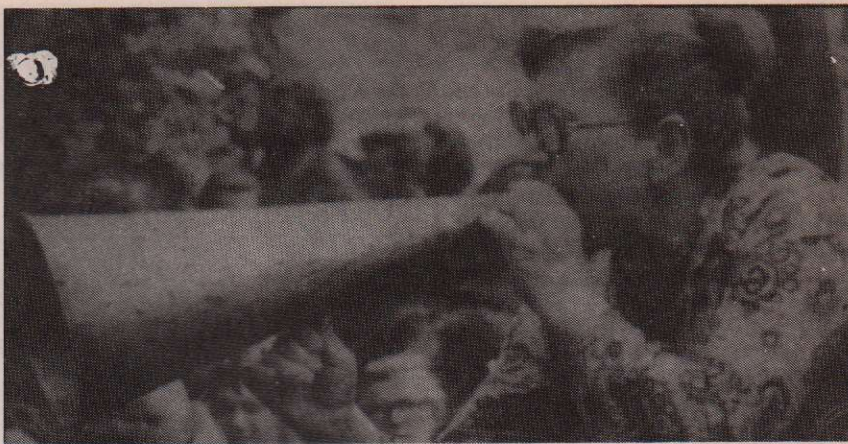
— The socialisation of large capitalist property and equal distribution of the wealth of society.

— Co-management and control of the whole of the national economy by the working masses along with the guarantee of minimum subsistence for every family and the cultural development of each individual.

— Freedom of struggle for the working class with rights to form free trade unions.'

On July 22, 1985, the official commemoration date for the establishment of Stalinist rule in Poland in 1944, there was a public demonstration in Biezanow, led by Walentynowicz and including Solidarnosc supporters from several different towns, displaying trade union banners. The demonstrators paid homage to the memory of the workers killed in Poznan in 1956 and on the Baltic coast in 1970. They paid homage to the thousands of Polish soldiers killed in Katyn by the Soviet political police at the beginning of the Second World War and to those soldiers of the anti-Nazi resistance who after the war disappeared into the 'Gulag Archipelago'.

According to a communique from Solidarnosc in Cracow issued on August 12, 351 women and men including workers, peasants and intellectuals from 11 regions of the country and 39 towns and villages had participated in the hunger strike up to that date. A total of 74 underground factory committees of Solidarnosc from several regions, including the 'Lenin' steelworks in Nowa Huta and the University of Jaguellons in Cracow have expressed support. Trade union leaders like Andrzej Slowik, Grzegorz Palka, and Jerzy Kropiwnicki from Lodz; Marian Jurczyk from Szczecin; Andrzej



Anna Walentynowicz rallies dock workers in historic 1980 strike in Gdansk. (DR)

Gwiazda from Gdansk and Seweryn Jaworski from Warsaw have all visited the hunger strikers. They have received a message of support from Kornel Morawiecki, leader of the Fighting Solidarnosc Organisation. The Biezanow protest is also supported by the Provisional Coordinating Committee of Solidarnosc in the mines (TKKG) in Upper Silesia which is conducting an intense propaganda campaign in support of this protest in its own region and which has sent delegations of miners to Biezanow.

On June 16, the strikers sent a letter to Lech Walesa asking him to take the correct position in relation to the situation in the country and to actively support the actions of different bodies inside Solidarnosc tending to reunite the movement in struggle. In a statement on August 21 they called on all those who, 'after five years of tactical and strategic errors' are 'persevering in their support for the ideals of Solidarnosc by preserving the unity of aims and keeping an open mind about the different forms the struggle for freedom can take.' In this statement 'the community of hunger strikers, organised around Anna Walentynowicz', affirm that 'the ideas of Solidarnosc are not only those of a trade union, but also map out the road which, in starting with unity will lead to the liberation of the mind and the independence of society.'

This willingness to take action against the crisis that the movement and its leadership are going through, even though it is at times more moral than political, is evidenced in the Biezanow protest.

Divisions within the Catholic Church are also increasing at this time. Some priests, beginning with those in the parish of Biezanow, support the action and are even helping it to be extended to other churches. Frowned upon by primate Glemp and his entourage, it is boycotted by the other priests who refuse to read messages from Biezanow in their churches. During the last traditional

pilgrimage to the Black Madonna of Czestochowa — the largest annual demonstration organised each year by the ecclesiastical hierarchy — the 52-strong delegation of hunger strikers from Biezanow were treated like outcasts by the priests responsible for organising it. Some functionaries of the Church apparatus accused the delegation of giving out political leaflets and of 'behaving like provocateurs.' They even accused some of being 'suspect' and in the pay of some sinister powers.

Under pressure from the organisers the delegation had to fold up their banners and finally entered Czestochowa with the poles held up in the form of a 'V' for victory. This provoked a great deal of ferment among the crowd around about who could not conceal their sympathy for the stikers.

As a Christian worker, Anna Walentynowicz has a particular conception of the Church which does not correspond to that of its hierarchy. She will not give in in the face of more and more energetic attempts by Glemp to roll back the social movement expressed within the Church. In the January 1985 issue of the *Biuletyn Dolnolaski*, an underground publication in Lower Silesia, she declared, a few weeks after the beginning of the strike that, 'We should gather in the churches, because they offer an asylum for free expression. The struggle must not take place in churches ... But the pulpit must serve the people, since we have got no other means of communication.'

This approach seems to be very popular among the workers. At the end of another workers' pilgrimage to Czestochowa on September 15, a mass involving between forty and a hundred thousand people, according to press estimates, openly declared their loyalty to the illegal trade union and did not attempt to hide the banners which they had brought in large numbers or to refrain from shouting 'No freedom without Solidarnosc!' □



# The issues in debate

IN THIS ISSUE of *International Viewpoint*, we are publishing a number of documents from South African organizations involved in the struggle against the racist regime. They illustrate the wide-ranging debate that is going on today in the movement of the oppressed and exploited in South Africa. The bourgeois press unfortunately does not give any clear picture of this discussion. The deliberate disinformation campaign of some of the media and the superficiality of other journals combine often to produce simplistic or largely fanciful views of the position of the forces involved in the struggle.

However, the special character of the South African social formation, the economic and social developments over recent decades, as well as the complexity of the strategic and tactical problems posed by the fight against the racist regime have promoted a diversity of political standpoints within the mass movement.

The selection of documents that we are publishing here is an attempt to offer an initial outline of the positions of the various currents. The objective of the following article is to point up some of the main aspects of the debate in the South African mass movement.

PETER BLUMER

South Africa has a very long history of mass struggles. The African National Congress (ANC) was founded in 1912. Many different sorts of organizations, groupings, splits, and alliances have had their moment on the stage. Political groups, unions, and a multitude of associations have arisen and then disappeared or undergone recomposition in the course of the struggles and the resistance of the oppressed. South Africa has never remained outside the great debates that have gone through the international workers movement. A Communist party was formed in 1921, which was rapidly Stalinized. A Trotskyist current appeared at the beginning of the 1930s.

## The political heritage of the mass movement.

The generations that came into radical activity in the 1920s and 1930s were caught up in furious debates on questions such as the objectives of the revolutionary process, the policy of noncollaboration with the regime, class alliances, and the nature of the Second World War.

All of this discussion and experience has left a political and cultural heritage for the new political mass movement. Of course, it would be wrong to overestimate the extent of collective memory in a country subjected to strict censorship and where at the start of the 1960s the repression severely restricted the possibilities for political organization. But there has not been such a break in the continuity of opposition as to cut off the new generations of activists from the body of previous experience.

This continuity of the opposition movement has been fostered by the existence of a layer of intellectuals among the oppressed and by the possibility that has existed for about a decade for publishing political analysis and historical studies as long as this was done in forms that took account of the censorship of "subversive" material.

The economic development South Africa has experienced has spectacularly expanded the ranks of the Black industrial working class. (1) At the same time, social differentiation has deepened within the Black petty bourgeoisie. All of this, ob-

viously has fostered ideological differentiation. It would indeed be astonishing if so complex a social movement produced a monolithic political expression.

The present situation demonstrates to the contrary that despite the national oppression that exists, despite the centrality of democratic demands in mobilizing the masses, and despite the immediate necessity for all the oppressed to concentrate their forces against the apartheid regime, there is, nonetheless, a very great diversity of political points of view about the immediate tactical problems and long-term perspectives.

It is for this reason, in part that it is absurd to present the ANC as "the national liberation movement" regardless, and as the only legitimate representative of the South African people, or the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), which is linked to the ANC, as the only legitimate representative of the working class.

For reasons that have to do with its economic and social development, South Africa cannot give rise to a nationalist movement comparable to the Angolan People's Liberation Movement (MPLA) or the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO). A complex national and social formation naturally engenders different points of view. And this leads to different sorts of practical activity, inasmuch as the mass mobilization enables each component of the movement to test its own political and organizational projects.

The big Natal strikes in 1973 and the youth rebellion in Soweto in 1976 were not, for example, inspired, or still less, led by the ANC. In the first instance, the actions were the first experiences in the struggle of a new working class, and they paved the way for the emergence of a new sort of independent trade-unionism a few years later.

As for the Soweto rebellion, it represented the peak of the Black Consciousness nationalist current, which was subsequently to exert an influence over a part of the workers movement.

For its part, the ANC has emerged today as the main current in the mass movement. After 1978, it attracted part of the activists of the Black Consciousness movement who had left South Africa and found themselves without perspectives in exile. For them, the armed-struggle policy that the ANC pursued in the refugee

1. The term "Black" is used in South Africa to unify the various components of the oppressed population. The apartheid legislation divides the population into "white," "Coloured," "Indian," and "Africans," the last being in turn classified according to the ethnic group to which they belong.



camps offered a solution to their political preoccupations. Some other activists were also won over to the ANC whilst incarcerated in the racist gaols.

The ANC is seen by a part of the mass movement today as the only political solution in day-to-day struggles because, for various reasons, the other political positions have not been expressed in concrete political perspectives for the masses.

Within South Africa, the ANC, which presents itself as the national liberation movement, has an extensive network of activists and active sympathizers, who work in the community organizations and in the trade-union movement. It is deeply involved in the United Democratic Front (UDF), alongside certain sections of the churches and white liberal organizations. It will therefore be able to draw towards it a section of the current movement. But it has not yet succeeded in winning the leadership of the process of organization that is going on in the industrial working class.

### The situation in the workers movement

To a large extent, the workers are organized at the plant level in a trade-union movement that is quite often hostile to the ANC and which is aiming to form a united national confederation at the end of this year.

Moreover, the growing Communist Party control over the exile apparatus of the ANC threatens to make the ANC leadership look more and more like an instrument of the CP, and this can only tend to provoke new debates with the other components of the mass movement.

In these conditions no political preconception can justify any necessity to conceal the political differences that exist. The struggle in South Africa is going to continue. It will be very prolonged and very complex. It is essential to be careful both about speculations and in noting and assessing the facts as they develop. Big changes in the political panorama are still possible. The proper approach, therefore, is one of active solidarity with all components of the mass movement.

The documents we are publishing here cannot give a full picture of the debate. In order to begin to get an idea of the discussion, however, let us start by outlining some of the main questions it focuses around.

South Africa experienced very strong industrial growth in the period 1965-1980 and along with it an abrupt growth in the Black working class. This young working class in itself posed an initial dilemma. Did not

its very existence make it necessary to build a new workers movement (or rebuild the old one)? Was it not necessary, therefore, to reconsider fundamentally the problem of developing workers organizations in a country where such a proletarian base, in the strict sense of the term, had not existed before?

This debate was a line of cleavage between a large part of the union leaderships and the Communist Party. Some leaders of the National Forum (NF) expressed a point of view on this question quite close to that of the unions. The Communist Party, which is banned in South Africa, denounced violently on a number of occasions those who were talking about organizing the workers movement, because it considers that it is already organized and already has a political vanguard, in the form of the South African CP.

Thus, the Communist Party leadership thinks that the union movement should accept SACTU as its framework for organizing and collaboration with the ANC. Up until the start of the 1960s SACTU was a major union organization. (2) Since that time, however, it has dwindled to being an exile apparatus under the control of the ANC.

It must not be thought that the SACTU has an influence in the workers movement comparable to the support that the ANC and the UDF seem to have in the mass anti-apartheid movement. For the moment, the leaderships of the main independent unions have enough authority in the Black working class not to leave the SACTU the same sort of space that the absence of a political alternative has left for the UDF and the ANC to fill.

In stressing the new responsibilities of the trade-union movement with respect to organizing the workers movement, some union leaderships have implicitly indicated a long-term political project, that is, paving the way for the emergence of a proletarian leadership by building workers struggles. (3)

The Communist Party has responded by explaining that by nature the unions cannot engage in political activity in the way a party can. Using quotations from Lenin, it has also denounced what it calls "a legal Marxism" in South Africa. (4)

In reality, all sides in this debate understand that there is a vacuum today because of the lack of a proletarian political leadership in a country where there is a powerful, concentrated, and mobilized working class. The ANC may fill a part of this vacuum, but it has not demonstrated that it can fill it entirely, inasmuch as it also has to serve as the

framework for a broad multi-class alliance. The Communist Party may have set its sights on filling this political space. But it is very little known inside the country today and cannot operate publicly.

On the other hand, the union movement is still far too heterogeneous and fragile to be able to shoot ahead toward assuming political responsibility. Nothing is settled in this area, and the process is only beginning.

For the reasons pointed up above, there are also major differences on tactical and conjunctural questions. Every component of the movement has its own view of the problems of bringing about a recomposition of the mass movement.

When the trade-union organizations began to develop at the start of the 1980s, some of them, such as FOSATU, thought that it was necessary to make tactical use of some of the rules imposed by the racist state, for example, the requirement that the unions obtain legal registration or participate in the industrial councils. (5) Others thought that compliance with such regulations was an unacceptable compromise with the regime.

The latter position was shared both by the unions influenced by the Black Consciousness movement and by the ANC and SACTU. It is possible, on the other hand, that the very tough position that the SACTU took on this matter had something to do with its relatively weak position in the union movement at the present time. Little by little, the major unions have come to accept registration and participation in the industrial councils. Moreover, the unions that sought to make noncompliance a political dividing line and a point of principle have lost ground, and now find themselves on the sidelines of the process of trade-union unification that is underway.

The problem of the tempo of the mobilization and the tactics for organizing the movement of the oppressed also comes up with respect to the formation of the UDF. Leaving aside the differences over this form of organization, to which I will return later, some unions have had to consoli-

2. Cf. "The African Communist" Organ of the Communist Party of South Africa London-Leipzig, No. 93, second quarter of 1983; No. 99, fourth quarter of 1984; and No. 100, first quarter of 1985.

3. Cf. "The Deepening Radicalization in South Africa," in "International Viewpoint" No. 65, December 19, 1984.

4. "The African Communist," No. 99. "The dangers of 'legal Marxism' in South Africa."

5. On this debate, see "Independent Black Unions in Southern Africa," in IV No. 8, June 7, 1982, and "A Federation of the Independent Unions" in IV, No. 31, May 30, 1983.



date their own ranks before plunging into other kinds of activity.

Their adversaries have seized on this caution to make a denunciation of the unions for what they analyze as a failure to take political positions. It seems that most of the main union organizations want to carry through the formation of a national confederation before considering how to act politically. This, however, did not prevent them last year from coming out against Pieter Botha's constitutional changes. (6) They called for a boycott of the elections to the Coloured and Indian parliaments in August 1984.

The differences really concern the timing and tactics for building the mass movement. Some think that the base of the community organizations in which the Chartist current, represented by the UDF is very strong, is already sufficient to permit a certain audacity in mobilization. (7) Others think that before taking any chances, it is necessary to stabilize the workers organization in the workplaces.

In the trade union movement, organizations such as the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), which are strongly linked to the Chartist current, have joined the UDF. Some federations, such as the General Workers Union (GWU), the Food and Canning Workers (FCWU), and FOSATU have not joined the UDF or the National Forum. The Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) made the very tactical choice of joining both, without playing any big role in their activities.

Another question related to the various analyses made of the workers movement is the problem of democracy in the mass movement. The biggest unions state regularly that one of their main concerns is educating their members in workers democracy. Some of them base their functioning on networks of shop stewards. No one has challenged their right to do so. But the affair has taken on another dimension in connection with the UDF.

Some unions accuse this front of being only a conglomerate of leaderships of various organizations that unites the members of these components only formally, behind a name, but does not offer them the basis for making real decisions about the UDF's political orientation.

This question assumed a greater scope when a difference appeared in March 1985 between the member organizations of the UDF and some unions over issuing a stay-away call in Port Elisabeth. Each side claimed that it had consulted its ranks democratically. The UDF was in favor of issuing the strike call. But the unions were for postponing the action.

This difference led to a bitter dispute, and trade unionists were even threatened with death by groups accusing them of betrayal. (8)

The national question is one of the most complicated issues in the South African situation. And different positions on it lead systematically to different courses of action.

While the Black Consciousness current has undergone considerable evolution and become more differentiated in recent years, it has also been based ideologically on the idea that all the oppressed (Coloureds, Indians, and Africans) had to liberate themselves psychologically and ideologically by breaking with the slave mentality and with white values.

This approach led in a certain way to the theory of two nations, a white nation and a Black one. For some members of this current, it was only from the Africans, which it saw as the most oppressed and exploited, that a real vanguard of the oppressed nation in formation could come.

The ANC and CP on the other hand, have held up till now the theory of "internal colonialism" and "colonialism of a special type." In line with this, they have considered that there were a number of distinct "nationalities" in South Africa, that is, the whites, the Africans, the Coloureds, and the Indians.

Thus, this current had to be in favor of distinct political mass movements for each of these "nationalities," with the ANC representing the Africans. (9) In reality, since the end of the 1950s, the ANC has debated the question of letting whites join its ranks. And at its recent congress, it decided to bring white, Coloured, and Indian leaders into its leadership.

A third point of view has been expressed, in particular, in the National Forum [published below on page 19]. The advocates of this position maintain that the objective of building an egalitarian nation in which there would be no discrimination is linked to the need for building nonracial class organizations open to people of all races. (10)

The Communist Party violently denounces this interpretation of the national question, and rejects the theory that "the struggle in South Africa is nationalist in form and socialist in content" as an ultraleftist position. (11)

No one, however, seems to oppose the idea that a nation has to be forged in the struggle. And no one seems, either, to contest the idea that this process will be linked to the fight for socialism. But that does not make the debate any less byzantine. In fact, the way each current analyzes the national question determines the

forces with which they seek alliances, as with Indian and Coloured petty-bourgeois layers and with certain sectors of white liberals. And this is combined with the debate on the nature of the revolutionary process.

The diverse terminology used in the antiapartheid mass movement — "Non-racial," "multiracial," "Black consciousness," "multi-nationalism" — thus reflects special debates and different political practices.

In the South African context, how is the national question to be combined with the social one? Depending on their answer to this query, the political organizations approach the problem of relations with the more privileged strata of the Black petty bourgeoisie in different ways.

### Class alliances

Under the apartheid system, the non-white petty bourgeoisie is, to be sure, subject to the same segregationist laws as the rest of the oppressed community. But, in particular among the Coloureds and Indians, there is a solid, stable, prosperous petty bourgeoisie. In commerce, you can even see the beginnings of an Indian bourgeoisie. And a similar phenomenon is starting to show up now among the Africans, even though the new African businesspeople are often only fronts for white companies in the townships, Black neighborhoods, and Bantustans.

The problem that arises for all those who want to bring down the apartheid system is on what level and in what form these social layers can be involved in the struggle for demo-

6. Cf. "Mass Response to new racist constitution," in IV, No. 46, February 13, 1984.

7. The editorial of the magazine "Work in Progress" of August 1985, No. 38, expresses a cautious point of view of the present state of the mobilization and the relationship of forces on the ground. "It is difficult to know whether the 'ungovernability' of some townships is the result of strong or weak organisation. But it is doubtful whether any organisations or leaders control the townships at present. And clashes between militant youth and some trade unions suggest that all do not accept the lip-service paid to working class leadership ...

"Government, through its army and policy, may be able to reclaim some townships. But the test for the democratic movements of the 1980s is whether progressive structures can survive this period. Neither the politics of popular mobilisation, nor the anger of the marginalised youth, are enough to threaten state power.

"Mass organisation, based on disciplined structures, democratic participation and a leadership responsible to organised constituencies, are the foundations on which an alternative society can be built."

8. "Work in Progress," No. 37, Johannesburg.

9. Cf. "The African Communist," No. 98, third quarter of 1984.

10. Conference of Hammanskraad, June 11-12, June 183, Publication of the National Forum Committee, Johannesburg, 1983.

11. "The African Communist," No. 97, second quarter of 1984.



cratic rights. This problem, moreover, is not so much one of mobilizing these stratas in the fight for democratic and national rights. Given their social nature they have in fact mobilized quite spontaneously on the questions. The difficulty lies rather in what organizational forms should serve to link their concerns to the democratic and social struggles of the toiling masses. For example, the UDF's detractors have criticized it for accepting the affiliation of a Black employers organization.

There are also major differences on such organizations as the Natal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Indian Congress, both of which belong to the UDF and are seen as a means through which the Indian petty bourgeoisie can exert an influence, since they are ethnically-based organizations. Here again, this is by no means a scholastic debate. The UDF has always presented itself as a multi-class front. And some currents see this form of organization as involving a danger for the long-term interests of the toiling masses.

In day-to-day practice, this question has definite tactical consequences. It is easy to recognize behind the positions of the UDF, which are often relayed by the ANC press, a strategic conception of "antifascist unity." Those who denounce this policy vigorously explain, among other things, that it holds back national unity of the oppressed by favoring organizations that are not "nonracial" because they include people on the basis of their ethnic classification under the existing apartheid legislation. The fact remains that some positions in this respect do not seem to have taken sufficient account of the tactical problems. It is one thing to criticise organisations that you may consider dangerous and another to fail to respond positively to the need to win a large part of the Black petty bourgeoisie for the struggles of the oppressed. On this question, one can sometimes see rather sectarian or workerist responses, which pose parallel problems to those of the UDF leadership's opening toward these petty-bourgeois social layers.

The problem is not white democrats or progressives who act as individuals or join the organizations in order to be active in them. Nor does the question of white workers arise very much at all today. In some cases, they may be attracted by the progressive trade-union movement. But the bulk of them have lined up with the right or the extreme right in order to defend their position as a labor aristocracy, that is the caste status accorded them by apartheid.

The debate is rather over the relations between certain white social

layers as such and their organizations. Here also the entry into the UDF of movements such as the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) or the Black Sash (a civil rights group) has provoked disputes. These organizations are seen as Trojan Horses in the democratic movement. (12)

More generally, the question arises of relations with the liberals who are led politically in fact by the dominant sectors of finance and industrial capital dominated by the English-speaking part of the bourgeoisie.

The liberals are becoming more and more active in South Africa. They are obviously an element in the imperialist strategy, and Ted Kennedy's recent trip to South Africa was not unconnected with this, nor was the meeting of South African businesspeople with the ANC in September 1985. (13)

The Chartist current itself will probably have to resolve quickly a major contradiction in this respect. It presents the Freedom Charter in fact as the *minimum* program of the democratic revolution, and this document calls for the "transfer to the community" of the "monopolistic" wealth. But at the same time the UDF and the ANC are looking for a tactical agreement with some liberal sectors. A question on this subject was recently put to Oliver Tambo by a journalist from the US magazine *Newsweek*. The ANC leader answered it in a rather vague way, saying: "South Africa is basically very wealthy, but that wealth is owned by very few people — three major companies, Barlow Rand, Anglo-American and Sanlam, control perhaps three-quarters of the wealth. The Blacks have virtually nothing, but most whites are excluded as well. The distribution of wealth is quite inequitable, and these monopolies will go. But below that level, there will be plenty of room for private enterprise." (14)

The ANC may be tempted to resolve this contradiction by ceasing to consider the Freedom Charter a minimum program and relegating it to a more remote stage.

While the ANC is very influential in a substantial part of the mass movement, it does not really dominate the movement. But the other components of the movement struggling against the racist system — churches, unions, or political movements are obliged to say where they stand with respect to the ANC.

While the ANC often presents itself as a national front in which there is room for everyone, the other components of the movement see it as a clearly defined political current. Therefore, the question of the UDF is seen by many people as one of unity with the ANC.

In the same way, in the union movement, the organizations that present themselves as the most "Chartist," while they are relatively small, have assumed the role of propagandists for establishing an organic link between the future single national labor confederation and the exile apparatus of the SACTU.

### The relationship of the mass movement to the ANC

Up until 1981, the SACTU considerably underestimated the process of the formation of new independent unions in the country. After recognizing the existence of this movement, the SACTU tried to bring it under its tutelage, so far without great success.

Outside South Africa, in the solidarity movement, SACTU representatives have at times not hesitated to rewrite history, portraying the new unions as the product of the underground work of the ANC and SACTU activists:

"The Apartheid system in South Africa will never be able to tolerate strong and progressive unions," SACTU said in a message to the Canadian unions in 1983. "Therefore, there has to be a second layer of leaders. SACTU consciously decided to go underground to form this other level ... The SACTU is the pillar that supports the unions working legally. Without it, the independent, nonracial union movement as it is today would not exist." (15)

This sort of self-proclamation is far from agreeable to the union leaderships inside the country, who know quite well that the real story is different. Nonetheless, the SACTU has one advantage, that of representing the ANC, which offers a certain political solution for the workers struggles. Therefore, the union leaders that are in political disagreement with the Chartist current have had to make clear their political "points

12. These two white organizations are defined as follows by the book "The struggle for South Africa, a reference guide to movements, organisations and institutions," Zed Press, London, 1984: NUSAS, "Antipartheid student organisation open to all students, but based mainly on white students (overwhelmingly of bourgeois background) at English speaking universities ... NUSAS represents one of the main left wing forces within liberal institutions." Black Sash, "Organisation based mainly on white women of bourgeois origin... In 1981 it supported a resolution declaring that the principles of the Freedom Charter offered 'the only viable alternative to the present exploitative and repressive system.'"

13. On the Kennedy visit, see "Rising struggle against apartheid spurs debates and maneuvers," in IV, No. 80, July 15, 1985.

14. *Newsweek*, September 16 1985.  
15. In French in original. "Sactu news letter," Summer 1983.



of view" in order to counter this pressure.

In some cases, this political conflict has led to splits in the unions. This happened, for example, in the Black media workers union, when the advocates of affiliating to the UDF decided to form a new union. (16)

## The armed struggle

The question of the ANC is now more and more linked to that of the Communist Party. The debates that the ANC has experienced over the last twenty years about white activists joining its ranks have become combined to a large extent with the discussion about its relations with the CP.

This could be seen, for example, at the ANC's last congress, in Morogoro in 1969, and the discussion recurred in the latest congress, which was held in Zambia in June. Joe Slovo, the white leader of the CP and already leader of the military wing of the ANC has just been elected onto the National Executive Committee of the ANC. Moreover, the general secretary of the CP is also a member of the leadership of the ANC.

In reality, the CP has had an influence over the ANC for a very long time. But the new political situation has undoubtedly put new demands on the apparatus outside the country. The theoretical documents of the ANC and the South African CP are more and more similar, and this osmosis is putting the question of relations with the ANC on another political level. In fact, it seems that the ANC has decided to make its political relationship with the South African CP much more explicit.

All those who seek to create an alternative to the ANC-SACP have stressed the sectarianism of the Chartist current and its tendency to favor alliances with white liberals. For example, the UDF has been denounced sometimes as a framework for class collaboration because it includes a Black employers organization and NUSAS.

In practice, the UDF is first of all an alliance between the ANC and the churches that oppose apartheid. Putting too much stress on the involvement of liberals could lead, paradoxically to a dangerous underestimation of the role of the churches as a means for controlling the mass movement.

Moreover, to convince the broad masses the agitation against collaborating with the liberals has no more concrete argument than the inclusion of NUSAS in the UDF. Now, it is one thing to think that the UDF reflects an attempt to build a bridge

to a section of the white bosses. It is quite another to think that oppressed masses can make such a political extrapolation right off the bat, however well founded it may be.

Among those currents in the mass movement with anti-Stalinist reflexes, some may think that the imperialists and South African big capital are out for an immediate deal with the ANC-CP leadership on the order of the one between the British and Mugabe's Zanu in Zimbabwe. However, the breadth of the mass movement, its steady radicalization, and the extent of Western strategic interests in South Africa limit the credibility of such projections.

After the repression of the 1960s the ANC chose the road of armed struggle, operating from bases in the Front-Line States. This armed struggle was conceived of as rural in character, and up until 1977 it produced no significant results. (17) After 1978, drawing the lessons of the Soweto events, the ANC has oriented toward armed actions in urban areas. This activity, in fact, can be more properly called "armed propaganda" than military struggle.

The ANC has carried out a series of very spectacular operations, such as the attack on the big Sasol plant. This propagandist activity has no doubt gained the ANC points in the mass movement. But two major criticisms have been made of these actions. Some see them as being to an extent irresponsible, ending as a rule in the sacrifice of activists and incapable of weakening the repressive arsenal of the regime, actions in the last analysis that make more difficult the task of those who are patiently building up the mass organizations.

In the new situation, with the spontaneous violence of the masses, it has seemed that the ANC's armed struggle did not help to advance the self-defense of the masses. Facing the army, the demonstrators still have only quite rudimentary means for defending themselves. Those who found a source of encouragement in the ANC's commando raids, for example some of the youth, are now expecting some concrete response from it for defending the townships against the police and the army.

While all currents in the mass movement obviously face the same problem, the ANC which has built a good part of its popularity on its capacity to carry out commando actions is now going to have to show that it is also concerned about mass self-defense and the problems involved in the violence of the oppressed masses.

In South Africa, it is all the more important to prepare the masses for violent confrontations with the repres-

sive forces because it would be illusory to hope for any major divisions in the bourgeois army.

The South African army is essentially a white army, created to defend the domination of the white race. In these conditions, the most that an anti-militarist, defeatist policy could hope to achieve would be to discourage some young whites from serving in a racist army. So far, no progressive force has come up with a satisfactory answer to these problems.

All these debates invariably come down to differences on the nature of the coming revolution. The CP and the ANC have clearly postulated the need for a national and democratic stage of the revolution in order to prepare the conditions for the transition to socialism.

Such forces as the AZAPO and National Forum leaderships, which are still very heterogeneous, have not yet entirely clarified their position on this question. But this current carries on general propaganda for socialism, and seems to suggest in some of its documents that the road to resolving the democratic tasks involves the fight for socialism. (18)

The UDF has not taken a programmatic position on such questions, inasmuch as that is not the function assigned to it by its founders.

Finally, it is notable that the press of some of the independent unions has systematically published educational articles about capitalism, social classes, and the fight for socialism.

In general, everyone agrees that the consciousness of the mass movement is developing first of all in a context of democratic and national struggles. The differences are over the role of the working class in the struggle and on the social nature of the state that is to come out of the revolutionary struggle and which is to resolve the national and democratic questions that are posed.

The anti-Communist laws, however, limit the clarity with which such questions can be debated. The positions of the CP and the ANC can be seen easily since they publish magazines outside South Africa and work underground inside the country. The other organizations, regardless of their character, are obliged to watch what they say and what they write. □

16. On the split in the Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA), see "South African Labour Bulletin," Vol. 9, No. 4, February, 1984.

17. There are many features that make rural guerrilla warfare impracticable in South Africa.

18. "Manifesto of the Azanian People" National Forum Committee, Johannesburg, 1983.



# The Communist Party (1)

THE FOLLOWING is an extract from an article entitled 'United front to end apartheid, the road to mass action in South Africa', written by L. Mzansi. The article appeared in *The African Communist* (the organ of the South African Communist Party — SACP) No 97 in the second quarter of 1984.

The article defines the strategic approach which the author believes should determine the line of action of the Communist Party in the mass movement. For a further article on this theme, see issue No 101 of *The African Communist*.

The annual address for 1984 of the President of the African National Congress, Comrade O R Tambo, a document rich in theoretical and practical insights, points out that the revolutionary ferment in our country has 'plunged the ruling racist clique into deeper and deeper levels of crisis.' The document goes on to explain that recent manoeuvres on the constitutional front by the Nationalist Party are an implicit recognition of the insolubility of the crisis. (1) The racist regime is involved in 'crisis management', a desperate attempt to see that things do not get entirely out of hand. 'In other words,' the statement continues, 'the fascists recognise that they can no longer rule in the old way.' (2)

The regime has begun to tinker with apartheid in order to entrench white domination. Among the reforms have been the new constitution, which gives to Coloured and Indian people a sham form of representation in parliament, and the Black Local Authorities Act, which claims to give 'urban Blacks' a greater measure of self-government over the urban ghettos.

President Tambo's statement emphasizes that these measures are a reaction to the growing revolutionary upsurge of the oppressed majority in our country and poses the question: 'What intermediate objectives should we set ourselves, building on what we have achieved, and in preparation for the next stage in our forward march to victory?'

In a key passage the president lays out the forces and structures

constituting the offensive against apartheid: 'Our revolutionary struggle rests on four pillars. These are, first, the all-round vanguard activity of the underground structures of the ANC, second, the united mass action of the peoples, third, our armed offensive spearheaded by Umkhonto we Sizwe and fourth, the international drive to isolate the apartheid regime ...' (3)

This article tries to examine some implications of the second "pillar", the united mass action of the peoples, in the light of the experience of the world working-class movement, and especially the theoretical contribution of Georgi Dimitrov (4) on the questions of the united and popular fronts.

Mass popular resistance to apartheid and white rule has reached unprecedented heights in our country. As never before, broad layers of the working people, youth, women and the intelligentsia are being drawn into political activity. This development, by its own momentum, has opened up possibilities for developing new forms of struggle and drawing in even wider sections of our peoples. But the organization of mass popular resistance poses special problems both at the level of practical activity and of theoretical understanding.

For Communists this new situation brings special responsibilities. As Lenin pointed out:

'To bring political knowledge to the workers, the social-democrats (ie the Communists) must go among all classes of the population, must despatch units of their army in all directions ... We must take upon ourselves the task of organizing

a universal political struggle ... in such a manner as to obtain the support of all opposition strata for the struggle and for our party'. (5)

We should note Lenin's emphasis on the broadness of the task facing the workers' party, which must address itself to *all* classes and *all* opposition strata.

In the art of going to the broad masses, much can be learnt from the experience in the 1930s of the Popular Front against Fascism and War and from its theoretical leader, Georgi Dimitrov. But in applying these lessons to our own struggle, we must constantly be aware of Dimitrov's warning to the Seventh Congress of the Communist International (CI) in 1935:

"It is necessary in each country to investigate, study and ascertain the national peculiarities, the specific national features ... and map out accordingly effective methods and forms of struggle. Lenin persistently warned us against ... stereotyped methods ... mechanical levelling and identification of tactical rules, of rules of struggle." (6)

It is especially when approaching the problem of work among the broadest masses and the non-proletarian classes and strata that we should heed Lenin's advice to display 'the utmost flexibility in ... tactics'. (7) But such tactical flexibility must never be confused with opportunism or abdication of the ideological struggle.

Dimitrov's address to the Seventh Congress of the CI in 1935 was the culmination of many years of struggle by the working class against the growing menace of fascism. This struggle included armed confrontations and street battles. But it also included the struggle of the working-class movement 'with itself', especially in reaching a clearer understanding of the nature of fascism.

1. The nature of this crisis is analysed in the statement of the SACP Central Committee, September 1983, (*The African Communist* No 96, first quarter, 1984).

2. O R Tambo, 1984, 'Liberation is in sight; analysis of the present situation in apartheid South Africa and a call to the people by the ANC', London; ANC ppl-2

3. Ibid.

4. Georgi Dimitrov (1882-1949), a Bulgarian Communist who had moved to Germany attracted world attention when in 1933 he was imprisoned by the Nazis on charges of having set the Reichstag on fire. He defended himself at the trial and was acquitted. He became a Soviet citizen and served as executive secretary of the Comintern from 1934-43 and was chief proponent of the People's Front policy adopted at the Comintern's seventh congress in 1935. He was premier of Bulgaria, 1946-49.

5. VI Lenin 'What is to be done' in *Selected Works Vol 1*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.

6. Dimitrov, 1969. 'For the unity of the working class against fascism'. Sophia, Sophia Press.

7. VI Lenin, 1968 *Selected Works Vol 1*, Progress Publishers.



Although it fell to Dimitrov to present the final formulation, this process of understanding was a collective one, in which the experience of many Communist Parties (for example, the French, Italian and Bulgarian parties) played an important part.

The basic strategy worked out by Dimitrov and adopted by the CI was to form the broadest possible front of democratic classes and strata on the basis of the defence of democratic rights and against fascism and war. At the core of this broad popular front was to be a united front of workers' parties and organizations, based on a pact between the Communists and Social-Democrats and the uniting of their respective trade union centres ...

In the first place it was necessary to define the enemy's most vulnerable point, in this case the vulnerable point of fascism. Dimitrov defined the 'Achilles heel' of fascism very simply: its social composition was extremely heterogeneous. (8) Fascism posed as the champion of the nation as a whole, but in fact represented the most reactionary elements of the capitalist class. It followed that the development of a broad front must be based on discovering those interests of the various strata that could not be satisfied by the fascists, but instead were being ignored or trampled upon.

'In every country there are certain key questions ... agitating vast masses of the people ... around which the struggle for the united front must be developed.' (9)

Secondly, these key questions had to be taken up and expressed in clear language that the masses could understand.

'We must learn to talk to the masses, not in the language of book formulas, but in the language of fighters for the cause of the masses whose every word and every idea reflect the innermost thoughts and sentiments of the masses.' (10)

### National democratic revolution

Finally, it was necessary to be ready to find new forms of struggle and new organizational methods so that, as the mass movement developed, it could go over from defensive actions to offensive actions leading (in the conditions of that time) to a mass political strike.

In trying to apply the lessons of Dimitrov and the Popular Front to our own times and our own struggle, it is just as important to understand what is different as to see what is the same. The differences are very simple



Yusuf Dadoo (left) and Moses Madhida (right) in September 1979. Dadoo, who died in September 1983 was national chairperson of the South African Communist Party, vice-chair of the ANC politico military council and ex-president of the South African Indian Congress. Moses Madhida is the current general secretary of the CP and a member of the Executive Committee of the ANC. (DR)

but also very important.

Firstly, our struggle is a national democratic revolution whose main content is the national liberation of the African people, leading to a democratic state in which all oppressed minorities will find the fullest expression of their aspirations and interests. It is a struggle for majority rule against a small white minority that has monopolised political and economic power.

Secondly, the context in which the question of mass action has been raised (not abstractly, but by life itself), and in which organizations like the democratic trade unions and the United Democratic Front have emerged, is one in which the popular masses are on the offensive and hold the initiative. In this respect our situation differs radically from that in the 1930s when the working class was on the defensive against the fascist onslaught.

The first difference — the national democratic nature of our revolution — has two important implications. In the first place, it means that a strong objective basis exists for consolidating the unity of all classes, strata and national groups among the oppressed Black majority on the basis of the struggle for majority rule. Though it would be wrong to underestimate, or even deny, the existence of class and ethnic differences among the oppressed, it would be more wrong, and even more dangerous, to exaggerate them.

This means that it is not difficult to identify those issues around which the broadest possible unity of the

oppressed can be forged. As Dimitrov put it, 'The path is indicated by life itself and by the initiative of the masses themselves.' (11) This is what Comrade Tambo meant when he stated that 'the formation of the UDF was a product of our people's determination to be their own liberators.' (12)

Secondly, the national democratic character of our revolution enables us to identify the 'Achilles heel' of our enemy as precisely and in as few — though different — words as Dimitrov did. *The most vulnerable point of the white oppressors is their small number and their diminishing proportion in relation to the total population ...*

A proper understanding of the second major difference between Dimitrov's situation and our own struggle — the fact that we are on the offensive — also tells us how we can strike most effectively at that 'Achilles heel' and destroy white minority rule. To find the answer we can go back to Dimitrov. Writing about the difference between the united front (workers' organizations only) and the popular front (also peasant, petit-bourgeoisie and bourgeois democrats), he stated:

'Some comrades are quite needlessly racking their brains over the problems of what to begin with — the united proletarian front or the

8. CC of the CPSU; 1971. 'Outline History of the CI' Moscow. Progress Publishers.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. OR Tambo 1984.





Bishop Desmond Tutu addresses the crowd. The banner shows the growing power of the unions (DR)

antifascist popular front ... The united proletarian front and the antifascist popular front are connected by the living dialectics of struggle ... they are interwoven, the one passing into the other in the process of the practical struggle ...' (13)

It is in this sense that we should seek the answer to questions posed by united mass action: its dialectical relation to the other 'pillars' of our struggle, the ANC underground, the armed struggle and the international solidarity campaign. That the level of development of these four 'pillars' has been uneven is the manifestation of a universal law of social development. It means that our movement must be ready to shift the emphasis of struggle as conditions unfold. It also opens up positive possibilities for developing the mass struggle.

### Freedom Charter

As a result of its armed actions and of the ANC's underground political work, the prestige and standing of our movement among the masses are today higher than ever before. The Freedom Charter, the programme of our national democratic revolution, has become the principal rallying point and inspiration of the oppressed majority and democratic whites. Today it is around the Freedom Charter that all political forces and groupings are obliged to define their positions. It is this *political fact* that provided the basis for the emergence of the

United Democratic Front (UDF) and shows the way to its future development.

It is not necessary for an organization such as the UDF to take up a formal position in regard to the Freedom Charter. That position has been defined by life itself. As Mac Maharaj pointed out in an incisive contribution to *Mayibuye*, the UDF is not an alliance but a front of organizations that express their position in terms of adherence to the Freedom Charter.

What is important is not that adherence to the Charter be a condition of membership to the UDF, but that those member organizations who adhere to the Charter should through patient and brotherly discussion, and even more by joint action, make ever more evident the central importance of the Charter and its historical role in the unfolding struggle.

This being the case, it is not necessary, either, that artificial minimum conditions be formulated which would fall below the Charter in terms of political elaboration and which might be seized upon to block the open discussion and joint action which develop in the light of the ideals of the Charter. It is the task of the ANC and of the Communists to provide the ideological leaven that will raise the mass struggle to even greater heights. More important still, it is the task of these vanguard organizations to define the concrete tasks ahead and discover the issues around which mass action on the broadest possible basis can be instigated. In the words of Lenin:

'It is necessary to know at every moment how to find the particular link in the chain which must be grasped with all one's strength in order to keep the whole chain in place and prepare to move on resolutely to the next link.' (14)

The guiding principle in seeking that link is provided by Dimitrov: to define the enemy's most vulnerable point. If that vulnerable point is the enemy's inability to go on ruling in the old way, and the necessity he finds himself in to develop ways of enlisting sections of the oppressed in their own domination, then it follows that the concrete tasks of the mass struggle must be aimed at frustrating this aim.

It is in this sense that we should understand the following key passage in Comrade Tambo's address:

'We must begin to use our accumulated strength to destroy the organs of government of the apartheid regime. We have to undermine and weaken its control over us, exactly by frustrating its attempts to control us ... rendering the enemy's instruments of authority unworkable ... (and) creating conditions in which the country becomes increasingly ungovernable.' ... (15)

Our movement holds the high ground on the South African political terrain at the present time. Those who refuse to join such joint actions, whether for sectarian political reasons or out of sheer opportunism, will define themselves out of the struggle. The masses themselves will see to that. □

13. G Dimitrov *op cit*  
14. VI Lenin *Collected Works Vol 22*  
15. OR Tambo 1984 *op cit*.



## The Communist Party (2)

*WE REPRINT below an extract from an article entitled 'Botha's reforms have not changed "colonialism of a special type"' signed Denga and published in 'The African Communist', organ of the SACP.*

It is over twenty years since the South African Communist Party characterised the system in South Africa as internal colonialism (or colonialism of a special type) ...

As the SACP programme states, apartheid as it exists today is a continuation as well as intensification of the colonial relations that obtained before the British transferred power to the local settlers. Its evolution to modern forms was also determined by many other factors such as the balance of forces between the oppressed and the oppressors, intra-ruling class relations and so on — but in the final analysis, the apartheid system developed in the way it did to serve the capitalist imperative of profit.

From the above, two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it is this concrete historical approach which leads us to characterise the system as internal colonialism. An attempt to run away from this historical reality leads to such conceptual pitfalls as 'racial capitalism' which smacks of subjectivism in the writings of those who use it. The system is viewed as a product of the evil genius of the ruling classes rather than one shaped on the foundation of concrete, objective historical circumstances. This concept also persuades us to believe that national oppression does not engender antagonistic contradictions which can only be resolved by means of revolution, but that the ruling class itself can remove them if it so wishes! ...

As indicated above, the level of development of productive forces in South Africa is such that they have long come into conflict with the relations of production. The direct social consequence is the sharp contradiction between labour and capital. There is no doubting that the material prerequisites for socialism exist in South Africa: a certain level of industrialisation, socio-economic contradi-

tions and the force to carry out the revolution (the working class).

However, as we have indicated the system of capitalism in South Africa has its specific character arising from its colonial roots. Production relations here express more than mere economic relations; they also reflect the political position of the various sections of society. For a Black worker, the size of the pay packet is determined long before he enters the labour market. At work, the boss is white, and the Black workers' position vis-a-vis his white counterpart is determined in the statute books on the basis of his colour. Therefore, the nature of exploitation manifests itself first and foremost in the context of the place he occupies in the racial equation, in the specific way in which production relations manifest themselves under internal colonialism. He therefore not only sees his position on the factory-floor through the colonial screen, but also identifies with the rest of his number who belong to the lower 'caste'. This is not a false consciousness, but a reflection of the most immediate contradiction within South African society — between the oppressed people and their rulers.

### Alignment of the forces of the revolution

This is not to suggest that the day-to-day economic struggles of Black workers automatically assume a political content. Left on their own these constitute an attempt to get a better bargain for the workers' labour power within the confines of existing colonial relations. However, in so far as class struggle in the political sense is not an abstract 'pure' struggle against an abstract capitalist, but one waged under concrete conditions the struggle of the Black worker for improvement of his condi-

tions is inevitably bound up with the struggle for national emancipation from colonial oppression. Only this struggle can secure for the working class the necessary conditions for the emancipation of labour. And in the struggle to destroy internal colonialism, all classes and strata who suffer under its oppression are active participants ...

For any revolutionary movement, a correct analysis of the character of the system must aim at identifying the forces of change as well as those they are pitted against. The system of national oppression in South Africa (internal colonialism), like any other antagonistic system, 'has not only forged the weapons that are to destroy it, but also the men to wield these weapons.' These are first and foremost the Black workers who are the most dynamic and revolutionary force, the landless peasantry, the Black petty bourgeoisie and the rest of the middle strata. At the bottom of the pile stand the mass of the African people, 'the most oppressed and exploited of all'. On the other hand, most of the non-capitalist sections amongst the whites support and actively defend the system from which they gain materially, although, as the Communist Party programme states, it is not in their long-term interest. A few far-sighted individuals amongst them have joined forces with the oppressed and struggling Black people.

South African political life is in a state of flux. The independent historical actions of the democratic forces have thrown the ruling class into disarray; and the long-drawn-out process of disintegration of old alliances within the ruling class and its supporters appears to be reaching its culmination. A discussion of 'colonialism of a special type' cannot ignore this historic process, in particular with regard to its effects on the non-capitalist sections of the white community. The intensification of the armed and mass actions of the democratic majority is forcing the regime to adopt even tighter authoritarian methods of rule in relation to the white community.

What will be the long-term effects of this on them — a retreat into the Botha laager? What are the implications of the United Democratic Front's attraction into its ranks of forces ranging from liberals to revolutionaries? Have we fully grasped the strategic significance of the UDF slogan, 'UDF unites, apartheid divides'? Is it correct to characterise actions for democracy by a section of the white community as 'solidarity action' (or in the case of workers, acts of 'proletarian internationalism')? ... □



# The African National Congress

THE FOLLOWING are extracts from an article which appeared in the July and August, 1985 issues of *Sechaba*, the journal of the ANC. The article is signed by Mzala and is a response to criticism levelled, mainly by AZAPO, a member organisation of the National Forum, at the Freedom Charter which is the basic programme of the ANC. The article is entitled 'The Freedom Charter is our lodestar'.

Criticism of the Freedom Charter has lately been coming from a Committee calling itself the 'National Forum' and launched by certain individuals in South Africa as an organisational opposition to the United Democratic Front (UDF). At its founding conference, the National Forum adopted a number of resolutions as well as a 'Manifesto of the Azanian People,' [see page 23] which is meant to be an alternative document to the Freedom Charter. As reported by the *Rand Daily Mail* of June 13, 1983: '... a separate bid for unity has been started by the National Forum Committee, made up largely of Black Consciousness groups ... The National Forum, according to Mr Mkhabela of AZAPO, is not an organisation but only a committee intended to facilitate joint discussions among Black groups.'

At the end of this National Forum Conference (there have been others ever since to ratify the 'Manifesto') the conference adopted the 'Manifesto of the Azanian People' (which we shall hereafter refer to as the Azanian Manifesto), identifying 'racial capitalism' as the real enemy of the oppressed people of South Africa, and pledging to work for the establishment of an anti-racist, socialist republic. Readers of the South African press will remember how even *The Pace* magazine issue of September, 1983 (a magazine that does very well in promoting showbiz but which dismally fails to give one a good political portrait of South Africa) commented about the 'historic' significance of the adoption of this Azanian Manifesto:

'The oppressed people now have two documents setting out what the struggle is all about: the Charter on the one hand, and the Manifesto, which follows the Black Consciousness line, on the other.'

One cannot help marvelling at the inability of this magazine to comprehend the significance of the Freedom Charter in the history of South Africa...

The organisers of the National Forum Conference will most probably tell us that they were organising a forum for discussion and to create unity of the oppressed people against the Botha Constitution and the Koornhof Genocide Bills. (1) There is not the slightest doubt that any attempt at unifying the oppressed people for a determined struggle against the fraudulent constitution and death bills is a good thing. No one is arguing against the fact that the building of unity is and remains the paramount task for all politically conscious South Africans irrespective of their ideological persuasion. But the banner of 'Unity' must not be a false signboard; the cry for unity must not be made to conceal disuniting activities and intentions, which, it is hoped, the masses of our people will not be able to see.

Now, at the height of the efforts to form a united front of lovers of freedom and democracy to oppose the Botha constitutional fraud, when the masses of our people were rallying around the Freedom Charter, when everyone was moved by the desire to preserve people's unity against oppression and to demonstrate the political strength and the moral prestige of our freedom struggle in the formation of the United Democratic Front — at this very time, the National Forum Committee suddenly, without the slightest apparent need, called for a conference to adopt some 'Manifesto of the Azanian People.' Can such an effort be called unity?

As for the critics of the Freedom Charter, for them to flout the decisions of a truly representative historic

Congress of the People, which drew up the Freedom Charter, and equally to disregard the overwhelming democratic opinion of the mass movement at present taking shape in South Africa, for them to dissociate themselves from those solemn demands for people's democracy, is to advocate, at best, opportunism and, at worst functionalism. ...

Yet for the advocates of the Azanian Manifesto this political stand of the Freedom Charter is not revolutionary enough, for they, as the masters of the theory of socialism, want to bring about a socialist workers' republic in 'Azania'! Says the general secretary of Azapo in the October issue of *Drum* magazine:

'The problem with the Charter seems to be that it is co-optable by the capitalist structure. The Manifesto of the Azanian people is socialist. The Charterists have a block ... they get into a dead end street.'

Yes, it is true, as we shall demonstrate in greater detail later, unlike the Azanian Manifesto (which pretends to be socialist), the Freedom Charter is based on the historic realities of our country, and one of those realities is that all Black people, workers and non-workers, are nationally oppressed and are consequently involved in a national democratic revolution. The Freedom Charter thus asserts the necessity for the creation of a people's government as a principled alternative to racist apartheid rule ...

Perhaps the protagonists of the Azanian Manifesto are sincere socialists and not 'ideologically lost political bandits' as Zinzi Mandela called them — however, their probable sincerity is not the point. We know of a lot of socialists in South Africa who have a great respect for our Freedom Charter, and equally (if not more than anybody else) who fight for its realisation. The point is, why do the 'socialist' gentlemen [sic] of Azania scorn a democratic programme for a people's republic? Why do they (for the sake of socialism) want to skip the national democratic revolution, skipping the political interests of the people as a whole? ...

The real essence of the present phase of our revolution is not winning of socialism, but, as the Freedom Charter reflects, the winning of people's democracy, a true republic with power to the people, all the

1. The so-called 'Botha' constitution was adopted in September 1983 and endorsed by a referendum of the white population. It established a presidential system of separate parliaments for the Coloured and Indian population. The Koornhof proposals concerned Blacks' so-called 'right of residence' in white areas (see page 24). See *International Viewpoint* No 45 February 13, 1984.



people! The drafters of the Azanian Manifesto fail to see the revolutionary significance of this step, that is, the significance of the struggle for true national independence and self-determination. Nelson Mandela said in an article entitled 'Freedom in our lifetime' and published in June, 1956 in the ANC journal *Liberation*:

'Whilst the Charter proclaims democratic changes of a far-reaching nature, it is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state but a programme for the unification of various classes and groupings amongst the people on a democratic basis. Under socialism the workers hold state power. They and the peasants own the means of production, the land, the factories, and the mills. All production is for use and not for profit. The Charter does not contemplate such profound economic and political changes. Its declaration, "The People Shall Govern!" visualises the transfer of power not to any single social class but to all the people of this country, be they workers, peasants, professional men or petty-bourgeoisie.

'It is true that in demanding the nationalisation of the banks, the gold mines and the land, the Charter strikes a fatal blow at the financial and gold-mining monopolies and farming interests that have for centuries

plundered the country and condemned its people to servitude. But such a step is imperative because the realisation of the Charter is inconceivable, in fact impossible, unless and until these monopolies are smashed and the national wealth of the country turned over to the people. To destroy these monopolies means the termination of the exploitation of vast sections of the populace by mining kings and land barons and there will be a general rise in the living standards of the people. It is precisely because the Charter offers immense opportunities for an overall improvement in the material conditions of all classes and groups that it attracts such wide support.'

Even in South Africa, where national oppression seems to dictate to all oppressed people the inevitable need to unite and agree on what to fight for, there are always remarkably different ideological trends. And our movement owes its present shape and position to the bitter struggle it has fought over the years (even within itself) for ideological clarity against narrow national opportunism, liberalism, ultra-left Trotskyist childishness, and so on. It sounds incredible, but our real life and actual history has meant exactly this ideological struggle.

Chief Luthuli once said, in a special presidential message at the end of 1955:

'Faced as we are with the battle for freedom it seems a wise stand to say that the African National Congress should not dissipate its energies by indulging in internal ideological feuds — a fight on 'isms.' It is not practical and logical, however, to expect Congress to be colourless ideologically. She must in some way define or re-define her stand ...' This is exactly how it should be!

### The struggle against opportunism

It is this political and ideological cohesion of our democratic movement which makes us stand as the leaders of all others, a position which is inconceivable without an irreconcilable struggle against political opportunism. This democratic movement that is developing in South Africa, inspired by the Freedom Charter, will retain and further develop its militant unity by also opposing opportunist ideological trends and correcting political mistakes at the level of the theory of our revolution and at that of practical politics, whether these are committed with

*Procession led by Walter Sisulu of the ANC, 1952 (DR)*





good or ill intentions (it is often said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions).

'Socialism' is undoubtedly the most fashionable slogan at the present period, for even our liberal 'friends,' and narrow nationalists understand that it is the position one adopts to socialism, generally speaking, that differentiates a progressive from a reactionary in all countries. But it is very important for our theoretically-grounded organisers to give our people a concrete understanding of the course our revolution will follow, that is, the stages it will necessarily pass through. It is such an understanding, based on the theory of the South African revolution, that will make it clear that the political situation in South Africa does not by any means make the question of the socialist revolution the immediate task of the struggle. It will make clear, instead, that our immediate aim is to win the objectives of the national revolution expressed in the Freedom Charter, more particularly to achieve the national emancipation of the Black people and to destroy the political and economic power of the racist ruling class.

### Anti-Communist hysteria

There must be some strange mechanism in the thinking of the imperialists which makes them believe that once they have described something as 'Communist' then all members of the human race will want to run away from it. The racists of South Africa have always thought like this. When in 1956, the Pretoria government arrested 156 of our leaders and charged them with high treason, arguing that the Freedom Charter was a document inspired by Moscow, they hoped they would scare the masses of our people from the Freedom Charter. The masses, being oppressed by imperialism and racism, never moved in the hoped-for direction; on the contrary, they are irresistibly attracted by the Freedom Charter and almost everything that our enemies hate. In the end, the Treason Trial failed to diagnose Communism in the Freedom Charter.

The Communist bogey has never deterred our people from upholding the principles of the Freedom Charter and the democratic movement led by the ANC and its allies. Contemporary events show irrefutably that, slowly but surely, our politically conscious people are marching with the banner of the Freedom Charter held high above their heads — holding high the banner of people's demo-

cracy. Such a people's movement is invincible! Such a people cannot be deceived! Such a people cannot be stopped in their tracks by some 'inspired by Moscow' scare gimmicks.

Why on earth do our enemies and opponents imagine that they are the only ones who know what Communism really is? Why do they think they are

the only ones who store Marxist-Leninist literature on the bookshelves? Why do they imagine that the people of South Africa do not know what the SACP is and what it stands for? Do our enemies and the opportunists alike imagine that the members of the ANC do not understand the basis of the alliance with the SACP? □

## Freedom Charter

*THE Freedom Charter was adopted on June 26, 1955 by the People's Congress representing the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress, the South African Congress of Trade Unions and the Congress of Democrats. The following consists of major extracts from the Charter.*

\* \* \*

*We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:*

- that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people;
- that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;
- that our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;
- that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;

And therefore we, the people of South Africa, Black and white together — equals, countrymen and brothers — adopt this Freedom Charter. And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes set out here have been won.

*The people shall govern!*

Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws;

All people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country;

The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex;

All the bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities shall be replaced by

democratic organs of self-government.

*All national groups shall have equal rights!*

There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races;

All people shall have equal right to use their own languages, and to develop their own folk culture and customs;

All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride;

The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime.

The people shall share in the country's wealth!

All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside.

*The people shall share in the country's wealth!*

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people;

The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole;

All other industry and trade shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people;

All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions.

*The land shall be shared among those who work it!*

Restrictions of land shall be ended, and all the land redivided amongst those who work it, to banish famine and land hunger ...

*All shall enjoy equal human rights!*

The law shall guarantee to all their rights to speak, to organise, to meet together, to punish, to preach, to worship and to educate their children ...

... Let all who love their people and their country now say, as we say here:

'These freedoms we will fight for, side by side, throughout our lives, until we have won our liberty!'



# A view from the National Forum

BELOW WE REPRINT extracts from a speech entitled 'Nation and ethnicity in South Africa' given by Neville Alexander to a meeting of the National Forum on June 11-12, 1983. This speech puts forward a point of view on the national question which is opposed to that of the so-called 'Chartist' current but which does not necessarily reflect the views of other currents in the National Forum. (Source; publication of the National Forum Committee).

In South Africa, a peculiar development took place. Here, the national bourgeoisie had come to consist of a class of white capitalists. Because they could only farm and mine gold and diamonds profitably if they had an unlimited supply of cheap labour, they found it necessary to create a split labour market, that is one for cheap Black labour and one for skilled and semi-skilled (mainly white labour). This was made easier by the fact that in the pre-industrial colonial period white-Black relationships had been essentially master-servant relations. Racialist attitudes were then prevalent in one degree or another throughout the country. In order to secure their labour supply as required, the national bourgeoisie in South Africa had to institute and perpetuate the system whereby Black people were denied political rights, were restricted in their freedom of movement, tied to the land in so-called 'native reserves', not allowed to own landed property anywhere in South Africa and their children given an education, if they received any at all that 'prepared them for life in a subordinate society'. Unlike their European predecessors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the colonial national bourgeoisie in South Africa could not complete the bourgeois democratic revolution. They compromised with British imperialism in 1910 in order to maintain their profitable system of super exploitation of Black labour.

They did not incorporate the entire population under the new state on the basis of legal equality, they could not unite the nation. On the contrary, ever since 1910, elaborate strategies have been evolved and implemented to divide the working people into ever smaller potentially antagonistic groups. Divide and Rule,

the main policy of any imperial power, has been the compass of every government of South Africa since 1910.

In order to justify these policies the ideology of racism was elaborated, systematised and universalised. People were thrown into a set-up where they were categorised racially. They grew up believing that they were whites, Coloured, Africans, Indians. Since 1948, they have been encouraged and often forced to think of themselves in even more microscopic terms as 'Xhosa'; 'Zulu'; 'Malay'; 'Muslim'; 'Hindu'; 'Griqua'; 'Sotho'; 'Venda'; etc., etc. To put it differently: at first the ruling ideology decreed that the people of South Africa were grouped by God into four 'races'. The ideal policy of the conservative fascist-minded politicians of the capitalist class was to keep these 'races' separate. The so-called liberal element strove for 'harmonious race relations in a multi-racial country'. Because of the development of the biological sciences where the very concept 'race' was questioned and because of the catastrophic consequences of the racist *Herrenvolk* policies of Hitler Germany socio-political theories based on the concept of 'race' fell into disrepute. The social theorists of the ruling class then resorted to the theory of 'ethnic groups', which had in the meantime become a firmly established instrument of economic and political policy in the United States of America as well as elsewhere in the world. It is to be noted that this theory of ethnicity continued to be based on the ideology of 'race' as far as South Africa is concerned. From the point of view of the ruling class, however, the theory of 'ethnic groups' was a superior instrument of policy, because, as I have pointed out, it could explain

and justify even greater fragmentation of the working people whose unity held within itself the message of doom for the capitalist apartheid system in this country.

The fact of the matter is that the Afrikaner National Party used ethnic theories in order to justify Bantustan strategy whereby it created bogus 'nations' and forced them to accept an illusionary 'independence' so that the working class would agitate for political rights in their own so-called 'homelands'...

Those organisations and writers within the liberation movement who used to put forward the view that South Africa is a multi-racial country composed of four 'races' no longer do so for the same reasons as the conservative and liberal ruling-class theorists. They have begun to speak more and more of building a non-racial South Africa. I am afraid to say that for most people who use this term 'non-racial' it means exactly the same thing as multi-racial. They continue to conceive of South Africa's population as consisting of four so-called 'races'. It has become fashionable to intone the words a 'non-racial democratic South Africa' as a kind of open sesame that permits one to enter the hallowed portals of the progressive 'democratic movement'. There is nothing wrong with the words themselves. But, if we do not want to be deceived by words we have to look behind them at the concepts and the actions on which they are based.

The word 'non-racial' can only be accepted by a racially oppressed people if it means that we reject the concept 'race' that we deny the existence of 'races' and thus oppose all actions, practices, beliefs and policies based on the concept of 'race'. If in practice (and in theory) we continue to use the word non-racial as though we believe that South Africa is inhabited by four so-called 'races', we are still trapped in multi-racialism and thus in racialism. Non-racialism, meaning the denial of the existence of races, leads on to anti-racism which goes beyond it because the term not only involves the denial of 'race' but also opposition to the capitalist structures for the perpetuation of which the ideology and theory of 'race' exists. Words are like money. They are easily counterfeited and it is often difficult to tell the real coin from the false one. We need, therefore, at all times to find out whether our 'non-racialists' are multi-racial or anti-racists. Only the latter variety can belong in the national liberation movement...

We have to admit that in the liberation movement ever since 1896, the question of the different popula-



tion registration groups has presented us with a major problem, one which was either glossed over or evaded or simply ignored. I cannot go into the history of the matter here. We shall have to content ourselves with the different positions taken up by different tendencies in the liberation movement today. These can be summarised briefly as falling into three categories.

For some, the population registration groups are 'national groups or racial groups, or sometimes, ethnic groups'. The position of these people is that it is a 'self-evident and undeniable reality that there are Indians, Coloureds, Africans and whites (national groups) in our country. It is a reality precisely because each of these national groups has its own heritage, language customs and traditions' (Zak Yacoob, speech presented at the first general meeting of the Transvaal Indian Congress on May 1, 1983).

Without debating the point any further, let me say that this is the classical position of ethnic theory. I shall show presently that the use of the word 'national group' is fraught with dangers not because it is a word but because it fires expression to and thereby reinforces separatist and disruptive tendencies in the body politic of South Africa. The advocates of this theory outside the liberation movement, such as Inkatha and the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), draw the conclusion that a federal constitutional solution is the order of the day. Those inside the liberation movement believe contradictorily that even though the national groups with their different cultures will continue to exist they can somehow do so in a unitary state as part of a single nation.

We have to state clearly that if things really are as they appear to be we would not need any science. If the sun *really* quite *self-evidently* moved around the earth we would not require astronomy and space research to explain to us that the opposite is true, that the 'self-evidently real' is only apparent. Of course there *are* historically evolved differences of language, religion, customs, job specialisation etc among the different groups in this country. But we have to *view* these differences historically, not statically. They have been enhanced and artificially engendered by the deliberate ruling-class policy of keeping the population registration groups in separate compartments, making them lead their lives in group isolation except in the market place. This is an historical reality. It is not an unchanging situation that stands above or outside history. I shall show just now how this historical reality has to be reconciled through



*The people fight back against the racist state (DR)*

class struggle with the reality of a single nation.

The danger inherent in this kind of talk is quite simply that it makes room both in theory and in practice for the preaching of ethnic separatism. It is claimed that a theory of 'national groups' advocated in the context of a movement for national liberation merely seeks:

'to heighten the positive features of each national group and to weld these together so that there arises out of this process of organisation a single national consciousness' (Yacoob) whereas the ruling class 'relying upon the negative features' (of each national group) 'emphasises ethnicity' or 'uses culture in order to reinforce separation and division'. We can repeat this kind of intellectualist solace until we fall asleep, the fact remains that 'ethnic' or 'national group, approaches are the thin end of the wedge for separatist movements and civil wars fanned by great-power interests and suppliers of arms of opportunist 'ethnic leaders'. Does not Inkatha in some ways represent a warning to all of us? Who decides what are the 'positive features' of a national group? What are the boundaries or limits of a national group? Are these determined by the population register? Is a national group a stunted nation, one that, given the appropriate soil, will fight for national self-determination in its own nation-state? Or does the word 'national' have some other more sophisticated meaning? These are relevant questions to ask because the advocates of the four-nation or national-group approach maintain that a liberated South Africa will guarantee group

rights such as 'the right of national groups to their culture' and that we have to accept that if the existence of national groups is a reality and if each national group has its own culture, traditions, and problems, the movement for change is best facilitated by enabling organisation around issues which concern people in their daily lives, issues such as low wages, high transport costs and poor housing. Or as other representatives of this tendency have bluntly said we need separate organisations for each of the national groups, which organisations can and should be brought together in an alliance.

These are weighty conclusions on which history itself (since 1960 and especially since 1976) has pronounced a negative judgement. To fan the fires of ethnic politics today is to go backwards, not forward. It plays into the hands of the reactionary middle-class leadership. It is a reactionary, not a progressive policy from the point of view of the liberation movement taken as a whole. Imagine us advocating 'Indian', 'Coloured' and 'African' trade unions or student unions today!

There is a diametrically opposite view within the liberation movement even though it is held by a very small minority of the people. According to this view, our struggle is not a struggle for national liberation. It is a class struggle pure and simple, one in which the 'working class' will wrest power from the 'capitalist class'.

For this reason, the workers should be organised regardless of what so-called group they belong to. This tendency seems to say (in theory)



that the historically evolved differences are irrelevant or at best of secondary importance.

I find it difficult to take this position seriously. I suspect that in practice the activists who hold this view are compelled to make the most acrobatic compromises with the reality of racial prejudice among 'workers'. To deny the reality of prejudice and perceived differences, whatever their origin, is to disarm oneself strategically and tactically. It becomes impossible to organise a mass movement outside the ranks of a few thousand students perhaps.

Again, the historical experience of the liberation movement in South Africa does not permit us to entertain this kind of conclusion. All the little organisations and groups that have at one time or another operated on this basis have vanished after telling their simple story which, though 'full of sound and fury', signified nothing ...

Certainly, the population registration groups of South Africa are neither 'tribes' nor 'ethnic groups' nor 'national groups'. In sociological theory, they can be described as colour castes or more simply as colour groups. So to describe them is not unimportant since the word captures the nature or the direction of development of these groups. But this question of words is not really the issue. What is important is to clarify the relationship between class, colour, culture and nation.

### National bourgeoisie fails to complete democratic revolution

The economic, material, language religious and other differences between colour groups are *real*. They influence and determine the ways in which people live and experience their lives. Reactionary ethnic organisation would not have been so successful in the history of this country had these differences not been of a certain order of reality. However, these differences are neither permanent nor necessarily divisive if they are restructured and redirected for the purpose of national liberation and thus in order to build the nation. The ruling class had used language, religions and sex differences among the working people in order to divide them and to disorganise them. Any organisation of the people that does not set out to counteract these divisive tendencies set up by the ruling-class strategies merely ends up by reinforcing these strategies. The case of Gandhi or Abdurrahman (1) are good examples. Middle-class and aspiring bourgeois elements quickly seize control of such colour-based 'ethnic'

organisations and use them as power bases from which they try to bargain for a larger share of the economic cake. This is essentially the kind of thing that the Bantustan leaders and the Bantustan middle-classes are doing today.

Because they are oppressed, all Black people who have not accepted the rulers' Bantustan strategy desire to be free and to participate fully in the economic, political and social life of Azania. We have seen that the national bourgeoisie has failed to complete the democratic revolution. The middle classes cannot be consistent since their interests are, generally speaking and in their own consciousness tied to the capitalist system. Hence only the Black working class can take the task of completing the democratisation of the country on its shoulders.

It alone can unite all the oppressed and exploited classes. It has become the leading class in the building of the nation. It has to redefine the nation and abolish the reactionary definitions of the bourgeoisie and of the reactionary petty bourgeoisie. The nation has to be structured by and in the interests of the Black working class. But it can only do so by changing the entire system. A non-racial capitalism is impossible in South Africa. The class struggle against capitalist exploitation and the national struggle against racial oppression become one struggle under the general command of the Black working class and its organisations. Class, colour and nation converge in the national liberation movement.

Politically — in the short term and culturally — in the long term, the ways in which these insights are translated into practice are of the greatest moment. Although no hard and fast rules are available and few of them are absolute, the following are crucial points in regard to the practical ways in which we should build the nation of Azania and destroy the separatist tendencies amongst us.

— Political and economic organisations of the working people should as far as possible be open to all oppressed and exploited people regardless of colour.

While it is true that the Group Areas Act and other laws continue to concentrate people in their organisations — geographically speaking — largely along lines of colour, it is imperative and possible that the organisations themselves should not be structured along these lines. The same political organisations should and can function in all the ghettos and group areas, people must and do identify with the same organisations and not with 'ethnic' organisations.

All struggles (local, regional

and national) should be linked up. No struggle should be fought by one colour group alone. The President's Council proposals, for example, should not be analysed and acted upon as of interest to 'Coloured' and 'Indians' only. The Koornhof Bills should be clearly seen and fought as affecting *all* the oppressed and exploited people.

— Cultural organisations that are not locally or geographically limited for valid community reasons should be open to all oppressed and exploited people ...

### The historic role of the Black working class

The Black working class is the driving force of the liberation struggle in South Africa. It has to ensure that the leadership of this struggle remains with it if our efforts are not to be deflected into channels of disaster. The Black working class has to act as a magnet that draws all the other oppressed layers of our society, organises them for liberation struggle and infuses them with the consistent democratic socialist ideas which alone spell death to the system of racial capitalism as we know it today.

In this struggle the idea of a single nation is vital because it represents the real interest of the working class and therefore of the future socialist Azania. 'Ethnic', national group or racial group ideas of nationhood in the final analysis strengthen the position of the middle class or even the capitalist oppressors themselves. I repeat, they pave the way for the catastrophic separatist struggles that we have witnessed in other parts of Africa. Let us never forget that more than a million people were massacred in the Biafran war, let us not forget the danger represented by the 'race riots' of 1949. Today, we can choose a different path. We have to create an ideological, political and cultural climate in which this solution becomes possible ... □



1. Abdullāh Abdurrahman was a leader of the first significant organisation of the Coloured people — the African People's Organisation, founded in 1902. Though a largely Coloured organisation the group was in favour of Black unity. However, Abdurrahman was opposed to mass action and sought to use the voting power of Coloureds and Africans to influence events. His efforts were singularly unsuccessful. Gandhi, later to become a vital figure in the Indian independence struggle, during his time in South Africa founded, in 1894 the Natal Indian Congress. [Note by 'International Viewpoint'].



# Resolutions of the National Forum Committee

THE FOLLOWING are a selection of the resolutions and commissions voted for in the June 11-12, 1983 conference of the National Forum Committee. (Source; The National Forum Committee publication).

## RESOLUTION 2

That this National Forum noting:

(1) The struggle waged by the toiling masses is nationalist in character and socialist in content;

(2) The Black working class is the vanguard of this just struggle towards the total liberation from racist capitalism;

(3) The future Azanian state will be an anti-racist, democratic one;

(4) The international imperialism and racist capitalist systems promote the bantustans as counter-revolutionary elements to the revolutionary forces; And further noting that

(5) The usage of the land shall not be to the benefit of Azanians only but for the benefit of all Africa, the Third World, and the international community as a whole; Therefore resolves that:

(1) The land and all that belongs to it will be wholly owned and controlled by the Azanian people;

(2) Each individual will be expected to contribute labour according to ability;

(3) All proceeds accruing from collective labour shall be distributed according to the needs of each and every individual in Azania;

(4) The usage of the land and all that accrues from it shall be aimed at ending all forms of exploitation of man by man.

\* \* \*

## COMMISSION 1 THE BASIS FOR PRINCIPLED UNITY

Our struggle for national liberation is directed against the system of racial capitalism which holds the people of Azania in bondage for the benefit of the small minority of white capitalists and their allies, the white workers and the reactionary sections of the Black middle class. The struggle against apartheid is no more than the point of departure for our liberatory efforts. Apartheid will only go once the system of racial capitalism itself has been abolished by the people of Azania.

The Black working class is the driving force of our struggle. They alone can end the system as it stands today because they alone have nothing at all to lose. They have a world to gain in a democratic, anti-racist Azania in which their interests shall be paramount. It is the historic task of the Black working class and its organisations to mobilise the urban and the rural poor together with radical sections of the Black middle classes in order to put an end to the system of national oppression and capitalist exploitation by the white ruling class.

The successful conduct of our national liberation struggle depends upon the firm basis of principle whereby we will ensure that the liberation struggle will not be turned against our people by treacherous and opportunist 'leaders'. Of these principles, the following are the most important:

\* Anti-racism and anti-imperialism.

\* Non-collaboration with the oppressors and their political instruments.

\* That our struggle is one led by the Black working class to put an end to exploitation and oppression.

The Foundations:

\* That anti-racism will not only be an aim but a method of struggle.

\* That we actively mobilise the exploited and oppressed in opposition to the combined strategy of reform and repression as manifested in the

*Advertisement belies the reality (DR)*



P.C. Constitutional Proposals and the 'Disorderly' Bill.

\* That our primary task is the building of independent workers organisations — independent of the bosses, the state and reactionary petty bourgeois leadership on the basis of actively taking up the daily struggle of workers against exploitation and oppression.

\* That we popularise the demand for a united front of workers' organisations in direct opposition to any Popular Front Strategy.

\* That we popularise and explain thoroughly the demand for a Constituent Assembly as opposed to the popular demand for a National Convention.

\* That our co-operation be based on principled unity by which all tendencies have the right to propagate their programmes and the right to criticism but must adhere to the democratically drawn up principles and carry out the decisions taken by the majority after full discussion.

\* \* \*

## COMMISSION 3 THE LAND QUESTION

The commission recognises the need for a blueprint structured as follows:

1. Ownership.
2. Distribution.
3. Usage.

Ownership:

The general feeling was that the ownership of the land should rest in the dictatorship of the Black working class.

On the question why the land is going to be owned by the dictatorship of the Black proletariat it was answered that the outcome of the struggle should not be viewed in isolation from the fact that the Black working class should control the outcome of what they have struggled for and guard the future developments of socialism.

Distribution:

It was felt that in a socialist Azania each individual will be expected to contribute his or her labour according to ability and, therefore, the distribution of the proceeds accruing from collective labour shall be distributed



according to the needs of the individual.

Usage:

The usage of the land and all that accrues from it shall be aimed at ending all forms and means of exploitation of man by man. The land shall be held in trust by the state and not be alienated to the detriment of the people. The usage of land shall not be to the benefit of Azania only but for the benefit of all Africa and international trade. Land should act as a unifying force.

\* \* \*

#### COMMISSION 4

##### OUR MINIMUM DEMANDS

This document embodies broad principles which can be regarded as the beginning of an ongoing process. The continuity may be maintained by constant contact with all the organisations present and the demands thereby expanded upon. This would be achieved if the NFC convene meetings of this nature, not later than one year from this date. The NFC may co-opt others onto the committee and invite other organisations not present here today to participate in these ongoing deliberations.

That this National Forum realising the need to clearly define our goals and objectives in relation to the future Azanian state, and realising that the working class struggle against capitalist exploitation and the national struggle against racial oppression have become one struggle under the general control and direction of the Black working class; and further realising that the present South African racist capitalistic order militates against the true aspirations of the broad struggling masses led by the Black working class therefore posits the following as our demands:

1. The right to work where we want to.
2. The right to form Trade Unions that will heighten revolutionary worker consciousness.
3. The establishment of a democratic anti-racist worker Republic in Azania where the interests of the worker shall be paramount through worker control of the means of production, distribution and exchange.
4. State provision of free and compulsory education for all and that this education be geared toward liberating the Azanian people from all forms of oppression, exploitation and ignorance.
5. State provision of free health, legal, recreational and other community services that will respond positively to the needs of the people.
6. Development of one national progressive culture in the process of struggle. □

## Manifesto of the Azanian people

This historic conference of organisations of the oppressed and exploited people of Azania held at Hammanskraal on 11-12 June 1983 and convened by the National Forum Committee, having deliberated on vital questions affecting our nation and in particular having considered the implications of the Botha Government's 'new deal' strategy (the President's Council, constitutional proposals and Koornhof Bills) resolves:

(1) To condemn the murder of freedom fighters by the racist minority regime.

(2) To issue the following manifesto for consideration by all the organisations of the people to be reviewed at the second National Forum to be convened during the Easter Weekend of 1984.

Our struggle for national liberation is directed against the system of racial capitalism which holds the people of Azania in bondage for the benefit of the small minority of white capitalists and their allies, the white workers and the reactionary sections of the Black middle class. The struggle against apartheid is no more than the point of departure for our liberation efforts. Apartheid will be eradicated with the system of racial capitalism.

The Black working class inspired by revolutionary consciousness is the driving force of our struggle. They alone can end the system as it stands today because they alone have nothing at all to lose. They have a world to gain in a democratic, anti-racist and socialist Azania. It is the historic task of the Black working class and its organisations to mobilise the urban and the rural poor together with the radical sections of the middle classes in order to put an end to the system of oppression and exploitation by the white ruling class.

The successful conduct of the national liberation struggle depends on the firm basis of principle whereby we will ensure that the liberation struggle will not be turned against our people by treacherous and opportunistic "leaders." Of these principles, the most important are:

- Anti-racism and anti-imperialism.
  - Non-collaboration with the oppressor and its political instruments.
  - Independent working-class organisation.
  - Opposition to all alliances with ruling-class parties.
- In accordance with these principles, the oppressed and exploited people of Azania demand immediately:
- The right to work.
  - The right to form trade unions that will heighten revolutionary worker consciousness.
  - The establishment of a democratic, anti-racist worker Republic in Azania where the interests of the workers shall be paramount through worker control of the means of production, distribution and exchange.
  - State provision of free and compulsory education for all and this education be geared towards liberating the Azanian people from all forms of oppression, exploitation and ignorance.
  - State provision of adequate and decent housing.
  - State provision of free health, legal, recreational and other community services that will respond positively to the needs of the people.
  - Development of one national progressive culture in the process of struggle.
  - The land and all that belongs to it shall be wholly owned and controlled by the Azanian people.
  - The usage of the land and all that accrues to it shall be aimed at ending all forms and means of exploitation.
- In order to bring into effect these demands of the Azanian people, we pledge ourselves to struggle tirelessly for:
- The abolition of all laws that discriminate against our people on the basis of colour, sex, class, religion or language.
  - The abolition of all influx control measures and pass laws.
  - The abolition of all resettlement and group areas removals.
  - Reintegration of the 'bantustan' human dumping grounds into a unitary Azania.



## A view from the unions

THE FOLLOWING article consists of extracts from an interview with the general secretary of the General Workers Union (GWU) which appeared in the journal *South Africa Labour Bulletin*, in its November 1983 issue.

The GWU is one of those unions who are seeking to form a single union federation of South African workers. It is heavily implanted among dock workers. The interview deals largely with the relation between the unions and political organisations such as the UDF.

In the introduction to the interview, the GWU explains that 'we take issue with claims and resulting criticisms that we do not support the UDF or that we are "not interested in politics" ... We support any organisations opposing the new constitution and other laws which deny the majority of South Africans democracy. Our support obviously extends to the UDF ... As stated in the interview a national union federation may provide workers with the necessary support to participate in a multi-class organisation. Participation of workers on the ground, rather than through an alliance merely "at the top" would still be imperative' ...

*Question. Why has the General Workers Union decided not to affiliate to the United Democratic Front?*

*Answer.* The first point, which we've stated repeatedly, is that we are committed to supporting any organisation which opposes the constitutional proposals and the Koorhof Bills (1) and the UDF would obviously be primary amongst those organisations. We are also committed to the idea of doing campaigns with the UDF in opposing the Bills and the constitution. But we don't see our way clear to affiliating to the UDF. Our difficulties there relate to two broad areas, two broad issues. The first concerns the structure of many of the other organisations that are affiliated to the UDF, relative to the structure of a trade union. These structures are very distinct and critically different. Our second major area of difficulty relates to the essentially single class nature, working class nature of trade unions, relative to the multi-class nature of the UDF,

and of many of the organisations affiliated to the UDF.

*Q. What do you see as the essential differences in structure between the General Workers Union and other trade unions, on the one hand, and many of the organisations affiliated to the UDF, and why do you think those differences present obstacles to affiliation to the same organisation?*

A. The answer to that question is long and complicated. It's relatively simple, difficult as that has proved to be in practice, for one union to affiliate to another union, because trade unions to all intents and purposes have identical structures. They all have factory structures, branch structures, and national structures, so that one union can fairly easily lock into another union at all levels of both organisations. This is simply not the case with a great many of the organisations united under the banner of the UDF. To take two concrete examples from the Western Cape: the Ecumenical Action Group called TEAM, and the Detainees Parents Support Committee. The former is a grouping of progressive priests, and the latter is a grouping of individuals dedicated to opposing detention, and providing support for those in detention. Let me be clear from the outset that both of these are laudable and necessary ventures, but neither bear any similarities whatsoever to the structure of a union. The same can be said in varying degrees of a great number of other organisations affiliated to the UDF, all the youth and student bodies, for example. The critical feature that all these organisations have in common, as far as we can see,

is that they are primarily organisations of activists. To say they are organisations of activists is not intended as a slight in any way, and we believe that there is a great need for this type of organisation in South Africa. But we still insist that they bear no similarity in their structure or organisational practice to a trade union. This problem has been recognised by the UDF, in the Western Cape, where some organisations, referred to as mass-based organisations, have been given a certain number of delegates. Other organisations, those that we would primarily refer to as activist organisations, have been given a smaller number of delegates. While this recognises that differences do exist, we believe that it is an inadequate recognition. The difference between an activist organisation and a mass-based organisation is not one of size, and therefore of the number of delegates to a central body, but rather of the entire structure and functioning of the organisation.

As we see it, an activist organisation is essentially a grouping of like-minded individuals, who are brought together by a common political goal. Their activity consists in propagating their ideas amongst a constituency which they themselves define. Activists grouped together in this way, in an organisation of this sort, have a great deal of freedom of manoeuvre in the extremely flexible parameters in which they operate. They don't represent members in a strong sense. They propagate ideas amongst a certain constituency, or in a certain area, and as such play a very important political role. Unions, on the other hand, are not organisations of activists, and union leaders are not activists in the same sense at all, because they are representatives in the strongest sense. Union leaders don't claim to represent the views of the working class. They represent the views of their members. Church or student activists, can claim to represent the broader social aspirations of church congregations or student bodies and it doesn't really matter whether they are actually mandated by the broad mass of students or churchgoers, or whether they are not. By propagating their ideas or their line they attempt to make students or churchgoers aware of their broader interests and their social role. A union leader, on the other hand, can't go to a factory and claim to speak for the working class. He has to be mandated by workers in a

1. Officially called the *Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill*, the Koorhof proposals were introduced last year and concern Black people's right of residence in urban (or 'white') areas. It was falsely presented as a loosening of segregation legislation.



factory, and he has to be reasonably sure that the particular workers who have mandated him back up his mandate. In a union situation there is no alternative to working in that way ...

Most of the organisations affiliated to the UDF have as their legitimate political task, to appeal to the masses 'out there'. We have as our task the representation of the workers inside our organisation, and the painstaking process of drawing more and more members into the formal and disciplined structure of a trade union. This is a major reason why we've found it difficult to envisage fitting into the structure of the UDF. We've experienced huge difficulty in explaining to our members how we would fit into the UDF as a union, yet conversely we have found it very easy to explain to our members how we would fit into a trade union federation ...

*Q. You referred earlier to problems in the relationship between the union as a single class organisation, and other organisations affiliated to the UDF which are multi-class organisations. Could you elaborate on that?*

*A.* We'll have within our ranks members with militant political views, and we'll have in our ranks members with fairly conservative political views. We'll also have within our ranks a great many members who have few political views at all, people who have joined the organisation purely to fight their bosses. With a certain degree of tension now and again, these diverse views can all be contained within an organisation, because they are all held by workers.

To a certain extent this could also be said of any other mass-based

organisation. It could be said of student organisations where these are mass-based, it could be said of women's organisations where they are mass-based, it could be said even of a community organisation. It is conceivable that a woman joins a women's organisation to fight women's issues. Such an organisation should be able to contain within it a fair diversity of general political views as well. But there are two key differences. The first is that student and community organisations, and, although not necessarily correctly, women's organisations, tend to identify the state as their source of oppression. This means that they are inevitably more clearly politically defined, and their membership is more clearly a politically based membership. They don't have the bosses to intercede in the struggle in the same way that workers in a trade union do. Secondly, the fact of the matter is that in South Africa, most non-trade union progressive organisations, tend to identify themselves quite strongly with one or another political tendency.

This of course involves particular problems in Cape Town. I don't know if these problems are the same everywhere else. But here the community organisations are divided quite clearly into two groups. There was a possibility that affiliation could jeopardise the unity of, if not directly our union in Cape Town, certainly of some other unions in Cape Town. This is also especially sensitive when we've identified as a priority the formation of a trade union federation, with the even greater diversity of views that are contained therein. Just as we wouldn't want to do anything that would jeopardise the unity of the whole trade union movement. I'm aware that opens us

up to what has become a currently fashionable charge, namely that we are economistic. Although it's not always clear from those levelling the accusation, I take this to mean that we concentrate our activities exclusively on wages and working conditions, that we're not concerned with political struggle, that the only basis of our unity is the struggle in the factory. Its as such, a unity that makes little positive contribution to the national democratic struggle. There are two answers to this: the first is that a union must inevitably carry within it the tendency towards economism. A factory-based organisation by definition sets itself certain limits, and the General Workers Union has never made any claim to mystically transcend these limits. The second answer to the question is that the accusation reflects a very narrow, formalistic notion of what politics is, and that's what really brings us to a point pertinent to the question of the class composition of the union ...

More pertinently it doesn't go any way towards transforming a student organisation into a workers organisation. To say that workers constitute the majority of any Black community in South Africa is obviously true, but it doesn't mean that workers constitute the majority of community organisations, of organised community organisations, or organised community members. In fact, it's lamentable, but nonetheless true, that community organisations have had relatively little insertion into the ranks of contract workers, for example. In those rare cases where, the majority of a particular community organisation are in fact working class people, its possible that these working class members will have little influence at the top of

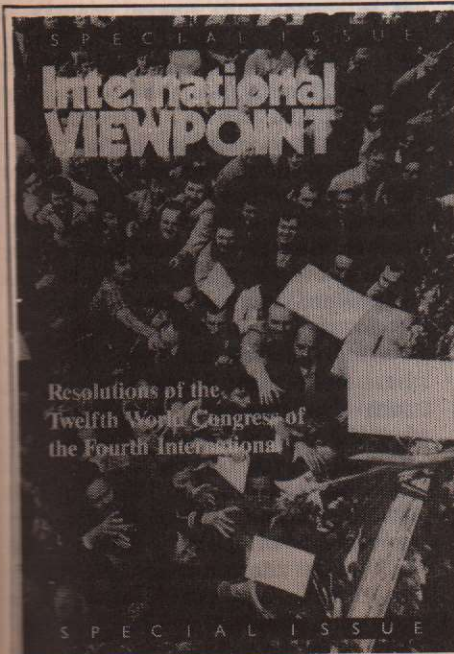
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the organisation, in the decision making structures of the organisation.

*Q. The participation of Western Cape trade unions in the Disorderly Bills Action Committee (DBAC) last year, seemed to be an unsatisfactory experience, not only for the trade unions, but for other organisations participating in the DBAC. Very little was achieved after a long series of meetings. To what extent do you think this has discouraged workers and trade unions in the Western Cape from participating in the UDF, which is seen as some bigger form of the DBAC? (2)*

*A. In the initial stages of the formation of the UDF, our experience of the DBAC definitely did influence our feelings about participation in the UDF. The experiences on the DBAC were uniformly negative, in the sense that we found ourselves in the middle of extraordinary squabbles. Sometimes they seemed to be squabbles based on straight power plays, straight questions of dominance between the two factions of the community organisation in Cape Town. The upshot of that was nothing got done, with respect to the Koornhof Bills. I recall a laughable situation on one occasion — I myself wasn't present there, but our representatives reported — where in the same week that the Koornhof Bills were withdrawn, the DBAC met. They sat through an entire three or four hour meeting without once mentioning the Koornhof Bills. The DBAC seemed to be set up for some other purpose altogether. The purpose seemed to me to be for one grouping in the community to achieve domination over another grouping in the community. This did colour our participation in the UDF at first, but it doesn't anymore. We, like I imagine other groups who were equally disappointed with their experience of the DBAC, have shaken off the ill effect of that experience. □*

*2. The DBAC was set up before the UDF to oppose the proposed constitutional reforms. It brought together several different organisations including the trade unions. Very quickly, big differences opened up on the functioning, the system of representation of the different component organisations and on what attitude to take to the different bills (see 'International Viewpoint' No 46, February 13, 1984).*

*In the end there was a split with one side subsequently launching the UDF.*

*The other organisations involved, some of whom are now in the National Forum, criticised this approach. They thought it displayed sectarianism and opportunism on the issue of the vote for Indians and Coloureds.*

*In the debates within the DBAC some currents had displayed a certain reluctance in calling for a boycott of the Indian and Coloured referendum proposed by Botha. On their side the unions, alienated by this experience, found further reason not to affiliate to the UDF. [Note by 'International Viewpoint']*

## Women's right to choose on trial

ON OCTOBER 4, 51 women and men will face trial in Ghent, Belgium, for the 'crime' of giving, procuring or having an abortion. The trial follows a police raid of a clinic in the town, in the Flemish-speaking part of the country and is part and parcel of a renewed attack on a woman's right to choose. We spoke to Marijke Colle, one of those accused and a long time fighter for abortion rights. Marijke is a member of the Belgian Socialist Workers Party (POS/SAP), Belgian section of the Fourth International, who are mounting a campaign in defence of those accused and in defence of women's right to abortion.

*Question. What is the current legal situation in Belgium with regards to women's right to abortion?*

*Answer. Abortion is illegal according to a law dating from 1867. It is seen as a crime against the family and the moral order so it is not, for example, characterised as murder and it is not part of the penal code. A doctor can be sentenced to from ten to 25 years imprisonment for performing an abortion. A woman who procures herself an abortion or anyone who helps her can be sentenced to five to ten years. So technically if you give someone an address where they can get an abortion you could be sentenced to ten years.*

*So, in Belgium abortion is a very serious crime. It should come to a high court with a jury but it never does because this would give it too much publicity.*

*Q. What has been the response to this?*

*A. Well, in spite of this law, in 1979-1980 the abortion movement started clinics — first in Brussels and in the French speaking part, then in the Flemish part where there is only one clinic. These clinics have a legal status as contraception clinics but they give abortions. In the first three years the justice system did not react to this activity. That gave some sections of the movement the illusion that it wasn't necessary to fight for delegalisation. We always argued against this — we said that the clinics are important, but we must continue through mass mobilisations to fight for changes in the law. Neverthe-*

*less in the last four years we haven't seen any big mass demonstrations or campaigns for two reasons.*

*Firstly, previous campaigns had not achieved a great deal because half the working class in Belgium is organised in the Christian trade union which is linked to the Christian Democratic Party — the CVP/PSC. They used Catholic ideology to stop any discussion on abortion. So we do not have even a potential parliamentary majority for legalised abortion. Also the bourgeois Liberal Party — the PVV/PRL has recently changed its attitude. It used to be anti the Church (although not for a woman's right to choose) and now it is shedding its liberal image — it is more like the Tory Party in Britain. Recently for example, the president of the Flemish Liberal Party said that they would never accept any extremist proposals on abortion. They are more and more opposed to a new law despite the fact that their own liberal women are more and more in favour. Basically the bourgeois parties attack every right which enhances self determination.*

*So that was the first problem. Secondly, in the last five years there have been many attacks on women such as attacks in social security, cuts in unemployment benefits, high unemployment of women etc. As a reaction to this we succeeded in building a coalition of the women's movement of both the big trade unions but the condition was that we could not take the abortion issue into the platform. In the long term this will have been a good thing*





Marijke Colle (DR)

because now we see it is possible to discuss with Catholic women about all sorts of issues but also, of course about abortion.

*Q. What is the background to the recent attacks?*

A. The public prosecutor in Brussels said that he was going to start prosecutions because it was high time that the law was applied. So slowly, the repression began to be stepped up — mainly against the clinics and not against the well-known professors and doctors in hospitals, because they know that the clinics are more vulnerable. The prosecutions came slowly at first and were fairly modest. It was very difficult to mobilise against them. Then one doctor in the Flemish University Hospital was prosecuted. He has virtually been doing abortion on demand. His defence became more and more political. It started from pointing out the dangers of back-street abortion and then declared publically in favour of a woman's right to choose. He was less vulnerable because he is a doctor. This was very good for the pro-choice movement and it helped other doctors not to be afraid.

This meant that the justice had to go further. So in December 1984, they raided the Ghent clinic. They seized all the material and every bit of paper (luckily the files of the patients were not there) and the accounts books. There were a few

patients resting after an abortion and together with the doctor who was there and two other women they were taken away for interrogation.

Following this, the clinic immediately started working again with new materials. The investigation was started and one hundred people were interrogated. The investigation was conducted by the Special Investigation Branch of the police force and was led by a woman!

As a result 51 people received a letter from the investigation office in which they were ordered to appear before the Chamber of Justice to determine whether or not they would be prosecuted by a correctional court. The charge was abortion. The 51 were made up of 14 doctors; 16 women who had been working with the clinic — I am one of those, and 21 patients who happen to have paid by cheque and were therefore suspected of having had an abortion. There is no actual proof that abortions were carried out. The clinic is, in fact a completely legal organisation, registered for contraception.

*Q. How prepared was the movement then to respond to this attack?*

A. Luckily we had been discussing just before the attack the need for a more public campaign which we had planned to launch in September 1985 — the anniversary for the launch of the centre. We had also decided on an emergency plan to get big

press coverage if something happened.

So we were able to organise a press conference and to reach every patient and mobilise supporters for June 14 — the day we had to appear in court. On the day 200 people, mostly women turned up and they got the decision put off until October 4. When the decision was announced we had a demonstration in town and it was on television. Now we are going to build a large campaign against this — the first mass trial on abortion. Abortion has become one of the key political issues for the women's movement and in the run-up to the election campaign. The election is on October 13 and the POS/SAP intend making this one of the major issues.

One important question at stake here is the attitude of the Socialist Party. In theory they are in favour of depenalisation but they never make it a central issue when discussing their programme for government. The line of the POS/SAP is to say that the Social Democrats must refuse to govern in a coalition. Why? Because if they participated in such a government they would stop fighting for, amongst other things, abortion rights. Instead they should be building, together with the women's movement and the trade unions, a mass mobilisation for the right to choose.

Also the abortion issue shows that the trade unions have to become independent of the CVP/PSC in order to be able to fight in the interests of the working class and that they need their own workers party to do this (See *International Viewpoint* No 79, July 1, 1985). This is very practical because recently there have been several developments within the Christian trade unions in this direction. Through the women against the crisis group we have been working in this direction with women from the Catholic trade unions.

In Wallonia there is now the beginnings of a political party that emerged from the Christian Workers movement and is independent from the bourgeois parties. It is interesting that they immediately took a position in favour of a woman's right to choose.

*Q. What do you want people to do to support you?*

A. They should send solidarity telegrams and messages to the Abortus Committee P/A Guinardstraat 3, 9000 Ghent and also to the POS/SAP at 29 Rue Plantin, 1070 Brussels. We would like our case to be publicised in the trade union, labour and women's movement internationally. The attack on abortion rights is being stepped up on an international level and we have to coordinate our response. □



# Shop workers boycott South African goods

ON FRIDAY September 13 Ruari Quinn, Irish Minister for Labour, announced an agreement for the phased withdrawal of South African produce from the four major supermarket chains in the 26 counties. The statement noted that the action may be extended over some time because of an apparent difficulty in finding a replacement supply. This announcement comes as a direct result of a 14-month struggle waged by a small group of Dublin shopworkers, who are members of the Irish Distributive and Administrative Trade Union (IDATU). While welcoming this announcement, the strikers noted that they will not return to work until there is a total ban on South African produce in Dunnes' Stores, the chain with which they are in dispute, where management has warned that they will not be exempted from handling South African produce, while a new supplier is being sought. Below we trace the history of this heroic and exemplary strike.

LIAM DAVITT

On July 19, 1984, Mary Manning, a young Dublin shop assistant, was dismissed for refusing to handle South African fruit. Mary was working at a city centre branch of Dunnes' Stores, the largest multiple chain store in Ireland. Twelve of the other 17 full-time workers at the store walked out in support of Mary's unique action and since then 11 workers have maintained a picket on the store.

This, the first strike in support of the oppressed Black masses of South Africa outside of the African continent, began when an individual worker followed a standing recommendation of her Trade Union. In remaining on strike for 14 months these 11 young workers (ten of them are women) have taken a firmer stand on the question of a trade boycott of the racist South African state than any European government.

The workers have received support from large numbers of Irish workers who refuse to pass the picket line, but, more importantly perhaps, they have also increased popular consciousness of the situation in South Africa and of the call of Black South African leaders for a ban on South African produce. Popular support for the strike has also been motivated by news coverage of the events in South Africa over the last year and the Irish people's own direct experience of imperialism and racism.

The leadership of the Irish trade

union movement acknowledged the principled position of the strikers by placing an Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) picket on the store. Practically however, the ICTU has done little else and it has been left to individual activists and local trade union branches to organise collections for the strikers and/or join the picket lines at the store.

Earlier this year the strikers approached Dublin dock workers who had been handling Dunnes' goods. The response of these workers in support of the strike forced the Dunnes' management to import South African produce through the northern port of Belfast.

The strike at Dunnes' Stores has also highlighted the hypocrisy of the Dublin government on the issue of collaboration with the South African ruling class. Many individual members of the Fine Gael-Labour coalition have spoken out in support of the courageous stand of the strikers. Others have vacillated on this issue by questioning the validity of the boycott tactic because of the possible effect it could have on the living standards of Black South African workers, a stance which ignores the fact that the call for a boycott originated in the Black South African community. But no matter what the 'theoretical' positions of the Irish ruling class and the government parties have been, none of them have taken any action

in support of the strike. The Irish minister for labour, Mr Ruari Quinn (a member of the Labour Party) supported the ruling of the Labour Court (the 26-county Employer/Trade Union conciliation body) which advised the strikers to return to work. Quinn hypocritically remains a member of the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement (IAAM), some sections of which have played a very supportive role during the strike. The Irish minister for foreign affairs, Mr Peter Barry, in his discussions with the other Foreign Ministers of the EEC countries, has failed to follow the lead provided by the strikers on the question of sanctions.

A key point in the strike was reached in July of this year when, approaching the first anniversary of the strike, some of the strikers set out on a tour of South Africa on the invitation of Nobel Peace Prize winner, Bishop Desmond Tutu. On arrival at Johannesburg airport the strikers delegation, which included a member of Action from Ireland (Afri), an organisation which has vigorously supported the strikers, was turned away by the South African authorities, who doubtless feared the publicity which the tour of the strikers would bring to that state.

Throughout the strike the strikers have received support from many left groups in Dublin, including People's Democracy, Irish section of the Fourth International. The strikers themselves admit having become more politically aware during the course of the strike and they now insist that no matter what course their union (IDATU) or the ICTU takes on the boycott, they will never handle South African produce again. Thus their minimum demand has been for the inclusion of a 'conscience clause' into employment contracts with Dunnes', whereby shop workers will be allowed to refuse to handle South African goods as an act of individual conscience.

The political maturity of the strikers has been underlined by the fact that they have led this strike through 14 morale-sapping months during which the Dunnes' management's response has been to point out that the strikers may not be employed again by Dunnes' Stores. In this historic struggle 11 young workers from one of the lowest paid sectors of the Irish work force are leading a fight on behalf of the entire Irish trade union movement against an intransigent management, who are exploiting the inactivity of the Dublin government.

*All messages of support for the strikers and donations should be sent to the Dunnes' Strikers' Support Fund, c/o IDATU, 9 Cavendish Row, Dublin 1.* □