

# South Africa's New Turmoil

A pamphlet from the  
Communist Workers  
Organisation



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## Introduction

For 15 years we in the Communist Workers' Organisation argued that the ANC were only the movement of the black nationalist bourgeoisie which would exploit the workers as ferociously as the white capitalists once in power. As we wrote many times:

*The reality behind what has happened is that the workers have been tricked into becoming the infantry of the rising African capitalist class as they struggle for political power.*  
(Workers' Voice 1992)

The next 18 years have only confirmed that analysis since in every aspect the ANC has ignored the appalling conditions of the working class as it kowtows to international capital. This is what lies behind the present unrest which now goes well beyond the mining industry. This short pamphlet is our homage to the South African workers in struggle.

# This is Class War!



"Occupy Wall St" and "Los Indignados" may have raised the banner of anti-capitalism in the West but for the last 2 months South African workers have reminded us what real class war is about. The Marikana Massacre of 34 miners shot by the police has unleashed a wave of (mainly) wildcat strikes. These began in the Rustenburg platinum mines of Anglo American then spread to gold, diamond and coal mines. These were followed by a wildcat at Toyota's car factory in Durban as well as a "protected" i.e. legal strike of lorry drivers which is drawing in rail and port workers. Over 150,000 workers are involved.

## The ANC – A Capital Organisation

For 15 years before the fall of apartheid we argued that the struggle for freedom had to be a class struggle. The ANC specifically opposed this. As Mandela himself said in 1964

*The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society.*

No wonder then that our prediction that the ANC would be invited by the white ruling class to save the system came true. No wonder that Anglo American were one of the first companies to support the ANC. Since then there has been a natural transition for anti-apartheid figures (like Cyril Ramaphosa the former head of the miners' union) into the boardrooms. After 18 years in power the ANC has produced a situation where, according to its own calculations, 9% of the capital of mining corporations is in the hands of black capitalists. The consequences for the working class have been dire.

- 40% of the working age population are unemployed. This represents 6 million workers 2.8 million of whom are between 18 and 24

- The urban underclass, surviving on welfare payments, has increased from 2.5 million in 1996 to 12 million in 2006
- 50% of the population live below the poverty line
- 7 out of 10 black children grow up in poverty

## **Unions Against the Working Class**

The South African mining companies made good profits in recent years from selling their commodities. But the collapse of the speculative bubble has hit the real global economy and profit margins are down. At the same time after two decades of near double digit inflation the workers are demanding a share of the wealth they created in appalling conditions.

After 18 years of union collusion with state and management the workers of Marikana whose working and living conditions are "pure hell" took matters into their own hands. In doing so they have come up against the combined forces of capital, the state, and their "own" union federation, COSATU. They now face massacre (death toll now over 50), lock-outs, media lies, sackings and false promises but still the strikes keep on spreading. At the time of writing union leaders, in league with the management, are trying to persuade workers to come back to work (like gangsters they offer "protection" from sacking!) and allow them to negotiate their working conditions. But the management, in the face of falling profits during a global recession, are already preparing to pull their capital out.

## **Victory?**

Some have declared the 22% wage rise at Marikana or the 4.5% wage rise (inflation is currently 5.5%) at Toyota as a victory. Compared with the past who can deny it? But as the ANC Government cuts interests rates so that the rand declines further (there is a world trade war going on and lower currency means you sell more) what capitalism might give today will go tomorrow. The workers have won much without much organisation but for how long?

The real problem today is the crisis of the world economy. Everywhere capitalism offers only more misery and worse. The real issue is not to squeeze some crumbs from the system but to alter the system itself. But this requires a political programme which does not just deal with one country but the global system. It is a long road we have to travel but workers everywhere will have to come together to form a global political organisation which aims to get rid of capital, money, national borders, wars and ecological calamity has got to be the aim. The alternative is more massacres and a descent into barbarism. Marikana miners have made a start. It has to be built upon.

# Marikana: Striking Miners Massacred by Police



"The ANC has never at any period in its history .... condemned capitalist society." The meaning of these words, proclaimed by Nelson Mandela at his trial in 1964, has now been spelt out in workers' blood.

On 16th August the police shot and killed 34 striking miners, and wounded a further 78, at the Marikana platinum mine, which is about 60km north of Johannesburg. The striking miners, led by the rock drillers, were demanding that their pay be increased from R4000 per month, (£300), to R12500 (£950). Such a tripling of wages was considered quite unacceptable by mine owners, Lonmin<sup>1</sup>, so the police were sent in to gun them down. Despite all the complicating factors, which we will consider below, this is essentially what happened. These events clearly show the ANC and their henchmen in the tripartite alliance which rules South Africa, namely the South African (so-called) Communist Party (SACP) and the Confederation of SA Trade Unions (COSATU) show no hesitation in butchering workers when they dare to threaten the profits of South African capitalism.

The pay demand, which the mine owners, the Trade Unions and the SA Government consider so outrageous, would give miners significantly less than the European minimum wage. To understand how workers survive on their present wages, less than a third of the minimum wage, one has only to consider the appalling conditions under which they work and live. Most miners live in the hostels, in which migrant workers were housed during the apartheid era, but a significant number now live in make-shift shacks which they have erected in open ground near the mine. Workers living in shacks have the advantage of living with their families, but these shacks have no electricity or sewerage and generally share a single tap between a number of shacks. The mine, which is the richest in the world, has 28000 workers, 3000 of whom are rock drillers. Rock drillers perform the most dangerous and heavy work in the mine handling a 25kg vibrating rock drill for 8 hour shifts every day. They frequent suffer in rock falls losing fingers, suffering broken bones or being crushed or killed.

The official trade union, the National Mineworkers Union (NUM) is a mainstay of COSATU and, like all unions, is hand in glove with the government. The NUM had signed up to deal with Lonmin which tied workers to their present pay until late 2013. To pursue their pay demand workers went outside the official union and in this they were supported by a new and unrecognised union, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). Lonmin got a court order declaring the strike illegal on 11th August and ordered workers to return to work by 17th or face dismissal. The strikers refused to return to work, armed themselves with traditional

weapons and occupied a small hill outside the mine, where they held mass meetings. The massacre took place when the police were trying to clear them from the hill.

Although the South African ruling elite, particularly the SACP and COSATU have tried to present all this as being the result of an inter-union battle it is actually a classic struggle of workers against capital with the real brutality of this struggle openly visible for all to see. The unions have only complicated the situation by dividing workers and diverting anger from the capitalist owners to other workers. The NUM is clearly on the side of the employers and has done everything to get the strikers back to work while the AMCU has gone along with the miners demands. The NUM is very unpopular with the Marikana miners and when its vice president came to the mine in 2010 to persuade the miners to accept Lonmin's pay offer, which is at present in force, he had a brick thrown at him and subsequently lost an eye. This time, when an NUM official came to speak to the miners, he was brought in a police armoured car to the hill where the miners were meeting, but refused to get out of the vehicle! He tried to speak from inside it! The message of the NUM was that the demand of R12500 was "not achievable" and workers should end the illegal strike.

The NUM has a lot at stake at the Marikana mine since it is losing members to the AMCU, and if its membership drops below 50% of the workforce it loses its negotiating rights. A host of privileges, bribes and incentives for union officials, which the mine owners provide, fall away if this right is lost. The NUM has done all it could to discredit the strikers and the AMCU union which supported their demands. Before the police massacre 10 people had already been killed. It is rumoured that the earlier trouble started when snipers supporting the NUM shot 2 strikers dead. This led to retaliation in which another 8 people were killed including 2 policemen and an informer. The NUM has divided the workers and engineered a situation where they have killed each other. This did not, however, deflect the strikers from the central issue of pay. Instead this initial bloodshed made the strikers more determined.

At the time of writing Lonmin have withdrawn the deadline for miners to return to work and the strike continues. The South African president, Zuma, in an attempt to restore credibility to the ANC regime has declared a week of mourning, ordered an enquiry and visited the mine. He told the strikers:

*I was not aware of any agreement between the government and employer that you must be killed as you say, but that must be investigated.<sup>2</sup>*

This strike follows a similar strike at Impala Platinum's Rustenburg mine in January in which demands by miners were eventually won. This strike was outside the NUM and like the present strike declared illegal. After the usual ultimatum the mine owners fired 5000 miners. However, this led to more miners coming out on strike. The owners responded by firing a further 17000 workers but still the strike continued. After 6 weeks of strike, and the loss of 21% of annual production, the owners capitulated and most of the sacked miners were re-employed and their pay was increased from R3000 to R9500. The Marikana massacre has generated a lot of sympathy in SA and as we go to press there are reports of the strike spreading. Other miners, in the Anglo American group and at Royal Bafokeng Platinum, have bypassed the NUM and put

forward similar pay demands to the Marikana miners. The massacre may actually fail to drive the miners back to work and Lonmin may well have to reach a pay settlement with the strikers.

### **ANC- the Political Arm of South African Capitalism**

As we have explained in previous texts<sup>3</sup> the ANC was brought to power to rescue South African capitalism from the cul-de-sac in which the apartheid regime had trapped it. The ANC has become the executive arm of South African capital while the African nationalists have used the power of the state to convert themselves into members of the bourgeois class. The present shooting of striking workers illustrates which side of the barricades the ANC is on more clearly than any of their previous crimes.

The South African capitalist class as a whole has benefitted from the 18 years of ANC rule. During their period of power the SA economy has grown by an average of 3.3% year on year whereas in the earlier 18 years the equivalent figure for growth was 1.6%. The size of the economy has almost doubled in the period of ANC power. In the same period the conditions of the working class have, of course, deteriorated. There is an unemployment rate of about 40%, an urban underclass of 12 million living on welfare payments and 50% of the population live below the poverty line.<sup>4</sup> SA has become the most unequal society in the world according to the World Bank

A narrow group of SA politicians have enriched themselves enormously. There are dramatic examples of this. Cyril Ramaphosa, ex-leader of the NUM in the 1980's, is now a mining magnate, one of SA's richest men, and is actually on the board of Lonmin which is fighting against the miners wage demands. Zuma himself is embroiled in corruption scandals and has just built himself a £15.5 million mansion with the spoils of office. Both Zuma and Mandela's family members have been involved in mining ventures. Just as in other capitalist regimes the majority of parliamentary deputies and three quarters of all the cabinet members have external capitalist interests outside their parliamentary offices.

Political voices are being raised against the ANC as their bourgeois nature becomes ever more apparent. This is how the "**Abahlali baseMjondolo**" or "**Shack dwellers**" association described the ANC in a press statement released after the Marikana bloodbath:

*The ANC have shown no regard for the people of this country. They are putting us in transit camps and trying to keep us in bantustans. They are leaving us to burn in our shacks every winter. They are beating us in the police stations. They are shooting us in the streets. Millions of us cannot find work. A government that kills its citizens is immoral and must be opposed by everyone. A government that kills its citizens has lost all moral right to govern. What happened yesterday is no different from the killings of the apartheid government. This is no different to the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 which claimed 69 lives. It is no different to the Boipotong massacre in 1992 which claimed 45 lives.*

*"We have to stop pretending that the politicians are our comrades"<sup>5</sup>*

This is quite right! The ANC have used the working class as its foot soldiers in its rise to power but when this class asserts its own interests in the only way it can, through withdrawal of its labour, the ANC is happy to shoot them down like mad dogs.

### **Role of the Unions**

As has been mentioned above the trade union confederation COSATU is in a tripartite alliance with the ANC and the SACP which rules South Africa. For workers to go outside the unions and raise their own demands is a threat to COSATU and the entire alliance. For the present, the alliance is pretending workers have been misled by the unofficial unions and strike leaders which is why SACP called for the arrest of the strike leaders and AMCU leaders. We have not heard a word of condemnation of the police.

The COSATU unions, especially the NUM, have been richly rewarded for their role in disciplining the working class. The leader of the NUM Frans Baleni, who in contrast to the miners he is supposed to represent is paid R105 000 per month (£8000), has expressed open contempt for the rock drillers, describing them as the most uneducated and illiterate of workers. When another group of workers at a mine owned by Zuma's nephew Khulubuse Zuma and Mandela's grandson Zondwa Mandela were not paid for 18 months the NUM refused to take up their cause, despite their membership of the NUM. This is a further illustration of their true role namely to sabotage the class struggle and support the interests of South African capitalism.

AMCU is a relatively new union formed in 1998 by workers dissatisfied with the NUM and officials expelled from it. It is not affiliated to COSATU. These factors give it a certain amount of independence and the recent strikes have seen its membership increase. However, if it replaces the NUM as the union recognised by the mine owners it will become the negotiator of the sale of labour power. This role will inevitably cause it to become a tool of the mine owners in the same way as the NUM is at present. This is because any permanent organisation of the class can only negotiate the sale of labour power. Working for better conditions within the present system of wage labour entails recognising the logic of the system. This is to recognise the need for profit and hence the exploitation of workers to produce this profit. The section of capitalism in which the unions operate should therefore become more profitable so that more crumbs can fall to the workers. The unions thus become defenders of the national capital and defend its need for increased efficiency, competitiveness etc. Their role becomes the organisation of labour, administration of reforms, implementation of redundancies pay cuts and all the things with which workers in the metropolitan countries are so familiar.

The alternative to this is the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system and the ending of wage labour, a path which no union will take. The only organisations which can take such a path are political organisations. The struggles of workers worldwide desperately need political orientation towards the construction of higher social form of production. This means the class struggle needs to be given a revolutionary orientation. There is a desperate need for a global political organisation of the working class.

As we wrote in our statement on the Marikana massacre:

*The tragedy is that the murderous violence of capital has no borders. The same things are happening in China, Brazil and many other countries on the so-called periphery of capitalism whilst in the "democratic" West nothing like this is taking place for the simple reason that there is no visible revival of the class. However at the first significant sign of a working class response even in our political latitudes the axe of repression will not be long in striking. In Italy, for example, the juridical weapons are already in place and comprehensive experiments have already been carried out on the ground (Genoa in 2001) even though this was not realised at the time.*

It is no longer a time "just" to denounce this scandal, to weep for the dead of the international working class, it is also time to make a real effort and organise a class party, a revolutionary programme, so that the future revival of the class struggle will not have as its target just the repression of the international capitalist class but also the political objective of overthrowing this class-divided society, of breaking the iniquitous relationship between labour and capital and of destroying the mechanism of capitalist productivity. The tragic episode of Lonmin and the 36 slaughtered workers is not the local story of a brutal event in far-off South Africa but is one act in a tragedy which is destined to be played out wherever the working class tries to raise its head".<sup>6</sup>

**CP**

#### **Notes**

1 Lonmin is a British mining company registered on the London Stock Exchange. It is the world's 3rd largest producer of platinum.

2 *Financial Times* 23/8/2012

3 See *Revolutionary Perspectives* 60 "ANC – A hundred years in the service of capital." It comes next here.

4 48% of the population live on £2 per day.

<http://www.unionbook.org/profiles/blogs/marikana-platinum-mine-massacre>

5 <http://www.unionbook.org/profiles/blogs/marikana-platinum-mine-massacre>

6 See <http://www.leftcom.org/en>

# ANC – A Hundred Years in the Service of Capital

In January 2012 the African National Congress celebrated the hundredth anniversary of its foundation and spent R100 million (£8.2M) on the party. It has now held power continuously for almost 18 years and so its leaders saw this as a great cause for celebration. However, the celebrations were largely for the political elite and the few who have enriched themselves from the ANC's rule. The working class, the unemployed and the impoverished millions, who have nothing whatsoever to celebrate, were conspicuous by their absence.

The ANC was founded shortly after the creation of the Union of South Africa by a handful of western educated lawyers and journalists at a time when African society still was largely tribal although the tribal economic subsistence system was being destroyed by capitalism. The ANC's founders turned their backs on tribal society and demanded equal rights for Africans within the emerging capitalist society, rights from which the settlement after the Boer War and the act of Union specifically excluded them. A further century of capitalist development, which has entirely destroyed tribal society, replaced it with capitalist society, and produced a predominantly African working class, has seen the ANC rise to become the dominant bourgeois force in South African politics.

The ANC which has always presented itself as a national movement, in particular one representing the interests of the entire African population, has in reality always been a party representing the rising African bourgeois class. The ANC's flirtation with the African working class has been a cynical manoeuvre to recruit workers as its foot soldiers with which it has been able to batter down the Apartheid regime and the resistance of Afrikaner nationalism. In its period in power from 1994 the ANC has taken over the management of South African capitalism and carried out this task like any other capitalist government in this period. Privatisations and opening of the country to global competition, while workers living standards have been cut, have been the order of the day.

At the same time the power of the state has been used to promote the party elite into the top ranks of the bourgeoisie through the famous Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programme. This programme has created a handful of black millionaires in positions of power in the mining and industrial corporations, a process which the regime tries to present as compensation for the sins of the past century, and as a demonstration that the position of Africans is improving. However, at the same time as they promote themselves to the ranks of the capitalist class they are creating an ever growing urban underclass dependent on state welfare payments and the gap between rich and poor is getting ever wider. Creating a black bourgeois class was, of course, always the ANC's programme, but the lie, which it has maintained, is that this would somehow benefit the African working class. This lie is now being cruelly exposed. Although the issues of racial division and racial oppression have always clouded the South African situation, and have been exploited to the hilt by both the Afrikaner nationalists and the African nationalists, the real contradictions in South African society, as in capitalist society the world over, are those



of class. The interests of the working class and the capitalist class are diametrically opposed and the ANC cannot reconcile the two. On the one hand the ANC has produced a situation where, according to its own calculations, 9% of the capital of mining corporations is in the hands of black capitalists while on the other hand it has created a situation where:

- 40% of the working age population are unemployed. This represents 6 million workers 2.8 million of whom are between 18 and

24.

- The urban underclass, surviving on welfare payments, has increased from 2.5 million in 1996 to 12 million in 2006<sup>1</sup>
- 50% of the population live below the poverty line
- 7 out of 10 black children grow up in poverty<sup>2</sup>
- Life expectancy has decreased from 65 years in 1994 to 53 years in 2009<sup>3</sup>

Such contradictions are threatening to tear the organisation apart. In the shameless enriching of its top members the ANC government has mired itself in corruption and cronyism which extends right up to the presidential office. At the 100th anniversary of its foundation there is actually little cause to celebrate.

### **18 Years in Power**

Since coming to power the ANC has been in a tripartite alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). This has been designed to shore up its power and provide political cover for its attacks on the working class. Needless to say workers have resisted the erosion of their wages and living standards and the last 2 years have seen massive strikes. In 2010 there was a civil service strike involving 1.3 million workers which lasted 20 days, and in 2011 there have been strikes in the mines, energy, petroleum, metal and paper sectors which have seen hundreds of thousands of workers down tools for pay increases. Although COSATU does its best to control and defuse these strikes, the general deterioration of workers' conditions is putting pressure on the alliance and opening up fissures in the ANC itself. It was undoubtedly pressures from those feeling dispossessed and betrayed by the ANC which led to the ousting of the previous president Thabo Mbeki in 2008 and his replacement by the more populist Zuma. The ousting of Mbeki has led to his faction leaving the ANC and forming a new political grouping Congress of the People (COPE). A further rupture, and a potentially more explosive one, has been opened by the disciplining and suspension of the ANC youth leader Julius Malema. Malema was a key supporter of Zuma during the defenestration of Mbeki, but the continual deterioration of the condition of workers and the poor has led him to turn his fire on the Zuma leadership and call for the nationalisation of the mines and the expropriation of white owned farm land. These issues, which are actually specified

in the "Freedom Charter," adopted as the ANC programme in 1956, are now quite contrary to the demands of South African and international capitalists and, of course the ANC leadership. Consequently they are a great embarrassment to the ANC. His raising of these demands from the past is like the proverbial ghost appearing at the wedding feast to wreck the party. Although he has been silenced and suspended from the ANC for a period of 5 years he is giving voice to widely held grievances and the demonstrations at his trial show he has a strong following which is not going to be placated by the silencing of one man.

The unemployed are also finding a voice. A spokesman for the Unemployed People's Movement accuses the ANC of betrayal:

*During the struggle our leaders embodied the aspirations of the people. But once they took state power they didn't need us anymore. We were sent home. We are only called out to vote or attend rallies. But all the time our people are evicted from farms, paving way for animals as farms are turned into game reserves under the pretext of tourism. Our people are evicted from cities. Our people are denied decent education.<sup>4</sup>*

In recent demonstrations, the unemployed demanding jobs, housing, running water and electricity have been met with ferocity similar to that of the Apartheid regime. At a demonstration in the town of Ermelo, in one of SA's poorest provinces, 2 protesters were shot dead by the police. At another demonstration, over precisely the same grievances, in the town of Ficksburg, a protester, Andries Tatane, was beaten to death by police in full view of the television cameras.

An explosive social situation is building up and could detonate if welfare payments are cut back. Certain commentators from within the ANC are looking nervously at the events of the Arab Spring, and seeing them as prefiguring the future for SA.<sup>5</sup>

While it is understandable that those in the Unemployed People's Movement and some in the ANC youth organisation see the ANC as having "betrayed" them is this really true?

## **Development of the ANC**

As mentioned above the ANC developed in a period when African society was in the process of being changed from a tribal economic system with Africans producing their needs directly from the land to a capitalist one in which tribal men and women were converted into wage labourers. However, the enforced separation of tribesmen from their means of production, namely their land<sup>6</sup>, and their conversion into wage labourers was accomplished by open violence and a doctrine of racism which tended to obscure the developing class divisions. Marx makes the following observation in regard to the separation of the producers from their means of production in the colonies:

*It is otherwise in the colonies. There the capitalist regime everywhere comes into collision with the resistance of the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself, instead of the capitalist. The contradiction of these two diametrically opposed economic systems, manifests itself here practically in a struggle between them. Where the capitalist has at his back the power of the mother-country, he tries to clear out of his way by force, the modes of production and appropriation, based on the independent labour of the*

*producer. ... To this end he proves how the development of the social productive power of labour, co-operation, division of labour, use of machinery on a large scale, &c., are impossible without the expropriation of the labourers, and the corresponding transformation of their means of production into capital. In the interest of so-called national wealth he seeks for artificial means to ensure the poverty of the people.*<sup>7</sup>

The major part of the dirty work of converting Africans into wage labourers was accomplished by the British who were quite clear as to what needed to be done. After the military defeat of the various tribes the British authorities started to expropriate their land and impose taxes on them in order to force them into wage labour to get the money to pay the taxes. Even after military defeat, however, this met with resistance just as described by Marx. For example the imposition of a £1 annual poll tax in Natal led to the 1906 Zulu rebellion. Earl Grey the British colonial secretary, writing in 1880, put the issue nearly as clearly as Marx. He wrote: *The coloured people are generally looked upon by the whites as an inferior race, whose interests ought to be systematically disregarded when they come into competition with their own, and should be governed mainly with a view to the advantage of the superior race. For this advantage two things are considered to be especially necessary: first facilities should be afforded to the white colonists for obtaining the possession of the land theretofore occupied by the Native tribes; secondly, that the Kaffir population should be made to furnish as large and as cheap a supply of labour as possible.*<sup>8</sup>

The process set in motion by the British continued after the creation of the Union of SA and the most significant clearing Africans from the land was accomplished the year after the foundation of the ANC by the 1913 land act. This restricted African occupied land to 7% of the total land, outlawed squatting on white owned land and sharecropping. Africans were forced to become labourers on the white owned farms or workers in industry or the mines. Provision of labour for the mines, however, had been a problem for South African capitalists from the start. In the period after the Boer War the British imported Chinese workers as unskilled labour to work the mines as insufficient African workers could be found. The separation of Africans from their lands was of course the key to the solution of this problem. It allowed the migrant labour system, which was eventually enshrined in Apartheid dogma, to become the norm for the mining industry. The mining houses organised a joint recruitment agency, the Native Recruiting Corporation, which operated from 1912 onwards and recruited from the South African areas reserved for Africans, which were to be reduced to a mere 7% of the country the following year, and from the British protectorates and Mozambique.

The overt racism which accompanied this process obscured the reality of what was really happening, and was of enormous benefit to South African capital since it produced a separation of white and black workers. Enormous pay differentials between blacks and whites existed and strikes on the mines were racially divided and so could be more easily defeated. This was the case for the most significant strikes, the white miners' strike of 1922 and the black miners' strike of 1946. The insurrectionary strike of white miners in 1922, actually inscribed on its banner the contradictory slogan "workers of the world unite for a white South Africa."

This is the historical context in which the ANC emerged, and it was also within this context that African workers imagined that the ANC could represent their interest since both African workers

and African bourgeoisie were discriminated against and excluded from political rights. This was, however, a serious mistake as 18 years of ANC power have shown. From its foundation the ANC has represented a westernised elite wanting to have their share of the spoils of capitalism, and has not attempted to disguise this. Mandela speaking about the Freedom Charter's demand for the nationalisation of the mines and industrial corporations said the following:

*The charter strikes a fatal blow at the financial and gold mining monopolies that have for centuries plundered the country and condemned its people to servitude. The breaking up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous non-European bourgeois class. For the first time in the history of this country the non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own, in their own name and right, mills and factories and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before.*<sup>9</sup>

Mandela again returned to this issue in his famous speech at his trial in 1964 where he said: *The most important political document ever adopted by the ANC is the Freedom Charter. It is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state. The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society.*<sup>10</sup>

It is therefore incorrect to describe the ANC government since 1994 as having "betrayed" the working class as its opponents now do. It has implemented a bourgeois programme and is doing its best to foster an African bourgeois class in broadly the terms described by Mandela above.

## **Rise to Power**

By the mid 1970's it was clear to the main factions of the South African capitalist class that the migrant labour system in particular and Apartheid in general were leading the country to catastrophe. The increased capital intensity of South African capitalism meant that a skilled stable working class was required. Their strategy was to create an African middle class which they could use as an ally against the working class via the Urban Foundation, and African trade unions which could be used to control the class struggle. Of course, this meant providing political rights to Africans as well as other rights granted to workers in the metropolitan countries. There was only one political force which could implement such a programme and that was the ANC.

As we have shown above the ANC was on the bourgeois side of the class barricades and this made its co-option as a tool of Western and South African capital possible. Before the ANC was unbanned the key sectors of South African capital, particularly the mining corporations, had received assurances that the statist elements of the ANC's programme, particularly the nationalisation of the mines would not be implemented. These were demands from the 50s which were considered suicidal in the period of globalisation. The slow deterioration of the social situation in the 80's finally convinced even the Afrikaner nationalists that bringing the ANC into power was the only route by which South African capital could be rescued from the cul-de-sac in which it was trapped.

Since coming to power the ANC has not fundamentally changed the structure of South African capitalism. Having the ANC in power has benefitted South African capital in many ways, particularly in giving it access to the rest of Africa and making the opening up of trade with China, India and Brazil easier. The programme of Black Economic Empowerment which was, in fact, initiated by the South African corporations, not the ANC, has resulted in a few extremely wealthy black men who have no desire to change the present structure of things, and still remain in the top organs of the ANC. Politicians such as Cyril Ramaphosa, one time secretary of the National Mine Workers Union, and Tokyo Sexwale, ex-Robben Island prisoner, have become two of South Africa's richest men through BEE. Both still retain their seats on the ANC's national executive committee.<sup>11</sup> All the above simply describes how the ANC has become the executive arm of South African capital. It is small wonder that the interests of the working class are ignored. The question which must be asked, however, is this "was the working class correct to ally itself with the ANC." Our answer is emphatically "NO."

### **Workers and the National Struggle**

Today it is a Marxist axiom that the working class should not subordinate its political forces to those of the bourgeoisie, which, of course, includes the bourgeois nationalist forces. As far as South Africa is concerned we have written many texts pointing out the danger of subordinating the class struggle to the demands of the national struggle. The events since 1994 have certainly born out our predictions. Many of these texts, written largely during the 80s retain their immediacy and a certain prophetic quality and we intend to republish them in pamphlet form within the next few months. An example of this is a text published in April 1990 in our paper Workers Voice. We wrote:

Many black workers look to Mandela as the man who will free them from exploitation and hardship. They are greatly deceived. ....In fact the ANC's objectives have nothing to do with the working class's interests, they are to use the power of the state to foster a black capitalist class. ...South African workers have no interest in placing themselves in the infantry of the African nationalists.<sup>12</sup>

Instead we advocated that workers should pursue their own interests independently of the bourgeois nationalists. This would have allowed the class issues involved to be clearly seen. Instead these issues have been obscured by a smokescreen of liberalism and moral outrage at racism. The result is a great confusion with talk of betrayal and projects to change the leadership of the ANC which can only be a great waste of time.

Much of the argument for supporting the national struggle, made by the Stalinists and Trotskyists, started from the view that Apartheid was essential to South African capitalism and hence ending it would bring South African capitalism crashing down. This would weaken western capitalism and produce a crisis in the developed capitalist countries etc. This has been shown to be complete nonsense. If anything South African capitalism is stronger as a result of the abolition of Apartheid, western imperialism has been strengthened and the class issues more confused than before.

Behind these arguments lies the theoretical debate between Lenin and other communists including Bukharin, Piatakov and Rosa Luxemburg on support for the national struggle. This argument was fought out in the period before and during the First World War. Those who argued like Luxemburg, that in the epoch of imperialism the national question is now a thing of the past, have been vindicated by the 100 years of history which have elapsed since these exchanges. However, in the Third International the Theses on the National and Colonial Question were a confused compromise between the views of Lenin, who saw cooperation with the local bourgeoisie as desirable and those (like M N Roy) who argued for an outright independent communist struggle in the colonies. This confusion was to have dire consequences for the revolutionary movement. The most tragic illustration of this confusion came in China 1926-27 when Stalin, following the original Theses but forgetting that they had called for an independent working class movement, instructed the Chinese Communist Party to place itself at the disposal of the bourgeois Kuomintang of Chiang Kai Shek. This resulted in the brutal massacre of Chinese workers in Shanghai and Canton<sup>13</sup>.

Lenin's positions were developed in the period before World War 1 when he considered the bourgeois democratic revolution was on the historical agenda for Russia. He changed his position on nature of the future Russian revolution in April 1917 but never followed through the consequences of this. If the communist revolution is on the historical agenda, and this revolution needs to be international, as the Bolsheviks openly admitted, bourgeois nationalist revolutions can only obstruct and weaken the struggle for communism.

Lenin's support for movements for national self determination in Europe undermined the programme for working class emancipation. This became more confused in the debates in the Third International with Lenin arguing that national movements in the colonies should be supported as they weakened the imperialism of the colonising nations. In this he was following his earlier work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* where he had argued that; Colonial possession alone gives the monopolies complete guarantee against all contingencies in the struggle with competitors.<sup>14</sup>

He argued that the colonies were a key source of the "super profits" with which the imperialist powers bribed their workers to maintain social peace. Out of such enormous super profits (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their own country) it is possible to bribe the labour leaders in the advanced countries in a thousand different ways.<sup>15</sup>

Cutting off this source of super profits, he argued, would precipitate a crisis and make revolution in the capitalist heartlands easier. In the event, decolonisation did not produce the crisis in the capitalist heartlands which Lenin had so confidently predicted. This is because the capitalist system is a global system, extracting and distributing surplus value globally, and the replacement of colonial bourgeois regimes by local bourgeois regimes does not alter the system as a whole in any essential way.

Lenin also maintained that national bourgeois revolutions in the colonies could occur at the same time as communist revolution in the capitalist heartlands and in some way support this revolution.

*The social revolution can come only in the form of an epoch in which are combined civil war by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in the advanced countries and a whole series of democratic revolutionary movements, including national liberation movements, in the undeveloped, backward oppressed nations.<sup>16</sup>*

On the contrary the communist revolution must be a world revolution and the bourgeois nationalist revolution could never support the world revolution. The world revolution would have to overthrow bourgeois nationalist revolutions if they occurred at the same time.

The mistakes of Lenin and the Third International have bequeathed a poisonous legacy which has been taken up by the left wing of the bourgeoisie, namely the counter revolution, with a vengeance. In the case of South Africa the arguments of a white workers aristocracy of labour, the theory of super profits going to the workers in the capitalist heartlands and the idea that the bourgeois nationalist revolution in the underdeveloped countries supporting workers struggle in the metropolitan countries have all been trotted out in order to justify subsuming workers struggles under the nationalist struggle.

Today the increasing globalisation of capital has made the national state national only in the sense that it is dominated by the bourgeoisie of a certain nationality. In its key aspects it exists as an agent of international capital and the imperialist alliances in which it finds itself. This can be seen in the fact that the coming to power of the ANC was facilitated by US and European capital via financial sanctions and pressure. After the removal of the threat of Russian advances in South Africa in 1989 this pressure became irresistible.

The ANC and African Nationalism in general stand completely discredited after 18 years of power. What is needed now is a clean break from the forces of nationalism and their allies COSATU and the SACP. These forces must be recognised as part of the bourgeois front opposing the emancipation of the working class. Future struggles should be outside and against these organisations. They need to be united across racial divisions and pursue class demands. Ultimately they need to be united with workers struggles worldwide and directed to the overthrow of capitalist social relations and the establishment of a communist<sup>17</sup> world.

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## Notes

1 See *Financial Times* 5/9/2011 and 28/10/11

2 *Financial Times* 12/11/11

3 See

<http://camerondudu.com/uncategorized/south-africas-tunisia-moment-will-occur-in-2020-says-moeletsi-mbeki>

4 See Ayanda Kota quoted in Counterfire

<http://counterfire.org/index.php/articles/international/15408-anc-centenary-a-display-of-elite-power>

5 See for example M. Mbeki "South Africa. Only a matter of time before the bomb explodes" Mbeki is media consultant to the ANC. see

<http://camerondudu.com/uncategorized/south-africas-tunisia-moment-will-occur-in-2020-says-moeletsi-mbeki>

6 Under the Bantu tribal system land was occupied by the tribe. Individual ownership of land did not exist before it was instituted by the colonial authorities.

7 K Marx *Capital* Volume 1 Chapter 23

8 Quoted in *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa*, B M Magubane, Monthly Review Press.

9 Mandela authorised biography, Anthony Sampson 1999

10 *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela p.435

11 See M Mbeki *Architects of Poverty* p.158.

12 See *Workers Voice* No 51

13 For a description of these events see H. Isaacs *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*.

14 *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Peking, Foreign Language Press p. 98

15 *Ibid*, Preface to the French and German editions.

16 Lenin *Collected Works* Volume 23 p.60.

17 By communism we mean a system of global production for human needs controlled by workers through workers councils. This has nothing whatsoever to do with the state capitalist systems, incorrectly called communism, which existed in Russia and China.

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## What We Stand For

The Communist Workers' Organisation is the British affiliate of the Internationalist Communist Tendency (formerly the IBRP). Our Italian sister group, the Internationalist Communist Party, was formed in 1943 as the only organisation to oppose all sides in the Second World War in the name of working class autonomy. Today we have groups of comrades in several countries round the world.

We stand for a global society in which production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers councils. It is a society which can only be created through the activity of millions of human beings. Only such a society can rid us of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: We call it communism but it has nothing in common with the Stalinist state capitalism of the old USSR.

We are working for a world proletarian political organisation: a 'party' for want of a better word. This organisation is not a government in waiting but aims to give a political lead in the struggle for a new world. The ICT by no means claims to be that party but only one of the elements which will come together in its formation. As the working class is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power. The ICT is not in competition with other genuinely working class organisations but seeks to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world's population, the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.

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