

WORKERS AGAINST APARTHEID



Articles from SOCIALIST ORGANISER, by BOB FINE and others

APARTHEID FACES ITS WORST CRISIS EVER

What is the significance of the talks the African National Congress has had with representatives of South Africa's capitalist class?

The most far sighted sections of the South African bourgeoisie have long been critical of the apartheid system because it creates social tensions that could at some point explode, threatening the very existence of capitalism. That is not to say that apartheid is not in the interests of the bourgeoisie — it provides them with cheap labour and boosts their profits. But it is to say that the less ideologically blinkered capitalists can recognise the contradictions that the system creates.

The crisis in South Africa now gives a new urgency to the attempt to find a 'reformist' solution — that is one that can minimise potentially revolutionary violence and therefore minimise the losses to the capitalist class itself. President Botha recognises this too in his own way: he has been attempting to find some middle road that allows the introduction of reforms without seriously alienating the extremists among the white supremacists.

Problems

For Botha there are two big problems: he is himself an extremist bigot who can barely bring himself to announce even the very minimal reforms that have been announced; and there is in any case no middle road for the apartheid system — it is not possible to reform it sufficiently to syphon off the black revolt and keep it, in essentials, intact.

For the big bourgeoisie, who for the most part are outside of the Nationalist — that is the Afrikaner — establishment, it is possible to experiment with more radical tactics to achieve the same basic end. To that effect Gavin Reilly of Anglo-American, the largest and most powerful of the mining houses, has proposed reform measures that would go much further than Botha is prepared to, though still fall short of ending the racist system. And further to that effect, a number of South

By Clive Bradley

African bourgeois have actively pursued 'talks' with representatives of the ANC.

From their point of view it is vital to cultivate good relations with the ANC. Sooner or later, they calculate, the apartheid regime will end and there will be black majority rule in South Africa. According to a recent survey by the Sunday Times the majority of South African whites agree with this assessment. Many who are half-hearted white supremacists, like many American capitalists who have a stake in the apartheid system in the shape of investments, consider it wise counsel to prepare for the future by making friends with political forces likely to be important in any black majority settlement. The ANC is an obvious candidate for courtship from that point of view. In particular, therefore, it is considered to be crucial to demand the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela: make friends and influence people.

There are of course some pretty major stumbling blocks for these South African bourgeois in their efforts to be nice to the ANC. First, the ANC is committed, and has been committed since the early sixties, to 'armed struggle' as a strategy to bring down apartheid. Executives of Anglo-American are unlikely to welcome such a commitment. And in any case it could be politically embarrassing to be too closely identified with forces openly calling for violence — indeed the ANC is currently calling for the street violence to be taken into the white areas.

Circumstances

De Zee de Beer, a former opposition MP, an Executive in Anglo and a participant in last week's talks, commented: 'We obviously cannot support the ANC's armed struggle policy; but that policy is the product of many circumstances. Perhaps the time will come when those circumstances will change'.

Even more problematic is



Despite the shootings the struggle continues

the ANC's apparent commitment to the nationalisation of the mining industry. In an interview with Newsweek magazine, ANC leader Oliver Tambo said: 'South Africa is basically very wealthy, but that wealth is owned by very few people — three major companies, Barlows Rand, Anglo-American and Sanlam...The blacks have virtually nothing...The distribution of wealth is quite inequitable, and these monopolies will go'. But Tambo added: 'But below that level, there will be plenty of room for private enterprise'.

Talks

After the talks de Beer noted that both sides believe in a mixed economy. He commented that their side had tried to persuade the ANC that nationalisation is 'not a remedy'. Nevertheless, some closer political agreement than that is going to be necessary if these talks are to come to much as far as the bourgeoisie are concerned.

Meanwhile further steps towards organising South

African liberalism have been taken with the setting up of a new 'convention alliance'.

Table

Founded by the leader of the main white opposition party, the Progressive Federal Party, and Zulu Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, the new alliance, which brought together over 150 politicians, business people, lawyers and civil rights campaigners aims to bring everybody — from the ANC through to the ultra-racist Conservative Party — round the negotiating table.

It is not just a naive and futile gathering of political children. The white opposition groups are representative of the big bourgeoisie — of people like de Beers. And Buthelezi is barely describable even as a liberal. His Inkatha movement, judged by its role in attacking more radical opponents of the racist regime, is in fact closer to being a pseudo-fascist movement — complete with armed thugs.

But these developments should give us cause for some

hope: they indicate the extent to which the ruling class is beginning to split in South Africa — and from that point of view it is worth recalling that a crucial feature of all revolutionary situations is the splitting of the ruling class.

The other feature is that the oppressed can no longer go on being ruled in the same way. And mass resistance continues, particularly among the youth in the townships. The ANC's call for the country to be made ungovernable has met with a huge response. The content of the call is questionable: Tambo, while calling for an insurrection, is also predicting that apartheid may survive another decade; but there can be no doubt that the black youth are answering the ANC's call.

Knowledge

It is the certain knowledge that they cannot beat down the coming revolution indefinitely that is forcing South Africa's ruling class into its greatest ever crisis.

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Black workers and the struggle for liberation in South Africa

Inside Apartheid

Eye-witness report by Bob Fine

THE FIRST thing that struck me about my month's stay in South Africa was the warmth of the welcome from all sections of the left.

I met trade unionists from an array of different organisations, political activists in the UDF, AZAPO and the new Unity Movement.

At no time did anyone raise any objection to my coming over. On the contrary: there was in my limited experience strong support for the development of links between the left in South Africa and in Britain.

It is not often that individuals from the British left go over to South Africa to feel for themselves the texture of the struggle there. My personal view that solidarity is enriched by immediate contact — even though a visitor's experience is very restricted — was, I think, shared by those I met.

I should also add that I personally encountered no significant instances of racism against white people, though of course there was no shortage of racism against blacks.

As for the violence: apartheid is quite successful in isolating black areas from white and insulating the white areas from the worst manifestations of violence.

Police assaults on white university students have

denied this wall of insulation. So too do the rumbling of military vehicles on the highways, and the daily newspaper reports of killings by the police and army.

While I was in Capetown 32 black people were shot dead.

The first time, so one well-informed Afrikaner intellectual told me, that the National Party government became conscious of a crisis as opposed to a policing difficulty, was after Botha's Durban speech when the rand collapsed and so did South Africa's capacity to repay foreign debts.

When you go into the black townships, you may see a different story. I went to a Soweto police station, the garrison filled with military, with a lawyer friend, to see if we could help secure the release of over 600 school students arrested that day.

Inside, the soldiers were tense, silent and hostile — in their own vision, men at war. We were grudgingly told that the students had been detained under emergency provisions for not attending school. We asked where they had been arrested. 'In school'.

True Alice in Wonderland.

The students were being marched under heavy guard into prison vans for transportation to prison. No visits, no legal aid, no clothing, no medicine, no doctors, no nothing. Emergency laws at work.

Outside parents and friends congregated. We collected names and addresses of detained children. Without this information no legal case could be entertained.

It's a Catch-22 situation, danger out of school and danger in school.

The atmosphere was angry but controlled. They were worried about their children.

On the way back the lawyer pondered his options. There was not much he could do. An application to court for abuse of discretionary powers? We both thought however that the students



Continued

would probably be released in a few days. There was no room in the prison. So it proved.

Everywhere in South Africa there is double talk. 'Apartheid is over' said the headlines in the Capetown newspapers, as Botha toured the homelands, praying for rain, and announcing this or that reform, in fact any reform but giving blacks the vote as equals.

In Durban the proto-fascist 'chief' of the Zulus was elevated as the great hope of the English-speaking liberal establishment. Buthelezi denounced violence, even as his impis imposed their own version.

The meeting in Zambia between the English and Afrikaner bosses of South African capital and the ANC was heralded in most of the English papers. The ANC leaders are quite intelligent, we read, up to date with the news inside the country, men we can talk the same language with.

The comment by Gavin Relly, the boss of the Anglo American Corporation, that he would rather do business with Oliver Tambo, head of the ANC, than with Edward Kennedy, was given prominence. Tambo's comments were of course censored.

I went to Mafeking, capital of the 'independent' homeland of Bophuthatswana. There the ultra-modern stadium, government house, and university lie in a middle-class oasis surrounded by relocation camps.

"We're South Africans", one of the university students said. "When abroad, when you do not recognise Mangope, the Bop chief, remember those who live under him".

Important work and education are being conducted in the university but it's very uneven. There are a number of progressives. Mafeking is a bit of a haven for draft evaders.

Mangope, unlike the Ciskei chief Lennox Sebe, plays his cards shrewdly and has some money to throw around. When Botha visited Mafeking students demonstrated. Mangope met them in person and said "I'll respect your right to demonstrate if you respect my right to invite my guest".

The demonstration was taken by security forces to

the rear of the conference hall. 'Free Mandela', 'Freedom Charter', 'Long live Mangope' slipped together.

The commuter workers, however, who live in Bophuthatswana and work over the border in South Africa, have no such loyalty to their 'chief'.

At my meetings with trade unionists I was struck by the very high level of organisation and discipline. Workers are hungry for educational programmes provided by the union. They were fervent in their commitment to trade union democracy. Can it be true, I was asked many times, that Arthur Scargill is president for life? Say the workers don't want him in the future. Should not the president be a worker rather than a full time official? Is he paid a worker's wages?

I visited the South African NUM offices shortly after their strike. Inside there were 150 dismissed and evicted miners living there.

The union had negotiated a deal with 80% of the Chamber of Mines, including the giant Anglo American group. The deal was for 23% wage increase and an end to job reservation.

However, two mining companies refused to negotiate: Gencor and Anglo-Vaal. The NUM called a strike against these two hard-line companies for their full 23% increase. The falling rand had pushed profits in the gold-mining industry sky-high.

The 150 men in the Johannesburg NUM office had been evicted from their compound and dismissed from work for joining the strike. The NUM was attempting to keep them together to fight for reinstatement.

I talked at length with one young miner from Mafeken in Bophuthatswana, mainly through an interpreter.

He told me that union

men came to the mine with the union flag and leaflets announcing the strike. The men were arrested but the word got through. He was due to be on the night shift when the strike broke out.

With the others, he stayed in bed in the compound instead of going to work.

The mine police took the strikers to the manager's office. They were seen one by one. The manager told them that the union had called off the strike and they would be dismissed if they continued. Most held out.

My informant said he slipped out of the compound to walk eight miles or so to the union office to tell them what was happening. The NUM officials, however, were surrounded by Defence Force soldiers and could not leave.

He slipped back into the compound in time to be rounded up by the mine police, many of whom were South African Defence Force soldiers in mine police uniforms, he thought, together with the day shift in the early dawn.

After threats and heavy beatings with sjamboks, about three quarters of the miners went back to work. The remaining strikers were herded into the quarantine camp which had been used for cholera cases among miners from Malawi.

My informant is nothing if not resourceful and again slipped out before the other strikers were herded into the camp. He made his way to the NUM office.

Some of the strikers were kept in the enclosure from morning to midnight without food or drink. At midnight trucks arrived to transport the strikers to a small town on the edge of Bophuthatswana.

They were given small sums up to 75 rand, a fraction of what they were owed. Their possessions were left

behind in the compound. They were ordered to make their own way home. Most are now dispersed beyond the union's reach.

My informant was very worried about the future but 101 per cent committed to the union. He said that he had one rand in his pocket. His wife and child are in Mafeken, and he fears that he and his family will lose their home.

The union called off the strike after a day in order to pursue a number of legal actions which are still in train. Through the Supreme Court and the Industrial Court they have been taking action over evictions from the compounds, over dismissals in a legal strike, and over theft of miners' possessions.

They are also suing management for contempt of court for failing to obey interim orders, and have perhaps a wild long-shot hope of putting management in jail.

The NUM has shot up to the status of a giant union in just a few years. It now has around 100,000 members and is ably led by Cyril Ramaphosa, a lawyer.

Most people I talked to thought that he had led negotiations with the Chamber of Mines very well until the last moment.

The union had won 23% increase in 80% of the mines and also the scrapping of job reservation. They had played on splits within Chamber of the Mines. However, the splits were then turned in the Chamber's favour.

The union could not call a general strike throughout the mines. It had threatened to do so if miners were victimised.

The two mining companies which refused to agree were those in which the NUM was least well organised. Perhaps it would have been better to hold off the strike until they were better organised, showing to the workers the example of what organisation could achieve elsewhere.

But it was a difficult decision, and the outcome is still in question.

The union is faced with the task of consolidating organisation among a rapidly growing militant membership. Most trade unionists I talked to had a very high regard for Ramaphosa and the NUM. 'A potentially great working class leader', was one FOSATU official's comment.



ANC president Oliver Tambo

Organising domestic slaves

Back in the city I was talking to a woman who is an organiser in the domestic workers' union. She told me of the street committees of domestic workers who would elect their own street stewards. When a domestic worker had a problem with her employer she would report to the street committee who would send the steward and other representatives to assess the situation for themselves and put pressure on the employer to change.

Since domestic workers have no legal rights, this is no easy business.

There is also a problem, she said, of where to meet. On one street they met in the garage of a friendly liberal employer but were reluctant to take decisions there for fear of being overheard.

Sometimes, she said, it was a case of low wages. One woman who received 20 rand a month got her wages upped to 120 rand a month — not a bad percentage increase.

Sometimes it was a question of time off. The union fought for a norm of one afternoon a week and two free days a month, a massive leap for most.

This is particularly important since domestic workers live alone at the back of their employers' houses, leaving their families behind in the townships or homelands.

In some cases it is a question of living conditions. One woman was put in an unheated caravan in the yard. The only toilet was in the house, and she was permitted to use it only when the 'master' was out. Otherwise she had to go into the bushes.

There are all kinds of other issues too. Since the recent troubles started, for instance, there has been a spate of incidents in which the domestic workers have been beaten up with sjamboks by their masters, in one case for being a few minutes late.

The union fights for contracts to be set up between employers and employees so that workers' rights can have some legal standing.

Overall my informant was quite confident on the trade union front. Gains were being made, women being organised, a democratic union structure established in a notoriously difficult area.

This was one side of her life. But there is another

which is proving less successful.

My informant is not a member of AZAPO, but she has associations with it. There are often AZAPO people staying in her house. In Port Elizabeth, where she lives, there is no love lost between AZAPO, a black consciousness grouping, and the UDF.

One night a large group of UDF people came to her house carrying sticks. Most of them were teenagers. They started to ransack the house, saying that they were looking for AZAPO leaders suspected to be hiding there.

She described the teenagers as her 'black children'. She told her 'children' that they were behaving exactly like the security policemen who had ransacked her house three times. She said that her words made an impression on them, but they did not leave before finishing their unsuccessful search.

Next day she went to the UDF office to cool things down. She met with the local executive to complain about her treatment. They apologised but also declared that they could not tolerate people harbouring AZAPO leaders.

A few days later, she said, a hand grenade (Russian made) was thrown through her bedroom window. She was not there at the time. Another grenade was thrown at the window of her car. It bounced off and exploded in the street. No-one was hurt either time.

She was adamant in her hostility to the UDF.

Why have I mentioned this? It is not meant to be a point for AZAPO at the UDF's expense. There is ample evidence of violence on both sides. In some areas it has become a feud.

It is far worse in the eastern Cape (the area which includes Port Elizabeth) than anywhere else.

Nor should we attribute to either the UDF or AZAPO more substance than they really have. Their structures are very loose and a lot of activity goes on in their names over which they have no control.

But the point is to raise the question of the relationship between trade union organisation in the economic sphere and community organisation in the political sphere. There is a sharp contrast in style.

FREE NELSON MANDELA!

"The struggle is my life", wrote Nelson Mandela in a letter from the underground on June 26 1961. "I will continue fighting until the end of my days". On August 5 1962 he was captured after a tip off by an informer to the police. He was charged with inciting African workers to strike in 1961 and with illegally leaving the country. He was sentenced to five years' hard labour.

In October 1963 Mandela was brought to court from prison to join other underground leaders arrested at a farm in Rivonia. Eight men, including Mandela, were sentenced to life imprisonment for sabotage and conspiracy to overthrow the government by violent means. They were taken to Robben Island to serve their sentence. Twenty-two years later Mandela is still in jail.

From his prison cell Mandela has become an embodiment of black resistance against apartheid. The call to free Mandela is one which resonates from all sections of the liberation movement.

Symbol

He is a living symbol not just of the repressiveness of the regime but of the capacity of the oppressed to fight back.

Many of the Western governments have joined in the call for the release of Mandela for their own reasons; they hope it will dampen the anger of blacks and provide a bona fide black leader with whom the South African government can negotiate a deal. Perhaps in their minds, eye lies the image of Kenyatta, drawn from prison to oversee a 'safe' transfer of power in Kenya.

Botha's position is that he will consider the release of Mandela — but only once he renounces the use of violence. Mandela himself, through his wife Winnie, has offered to meet Botha in prison to discuss the terms of his release. The offer has not been picked up. And so the matter rests.

Mandela is a leader of the African National Congress (ANC) and is reported by his daughter as replying to Botha's offer thus: "I am a member of the ANC. I am in prison as the representative of the people and of our organisation, the ANC, which was banned."

"What freedom am I being offered whilst the organisation of the people remains banned?...Only free men can negotiate. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts..."

"Mandela was not convicted alone", writes the ANC in its journal, *Secheba*, "but with others...If Botha talks of release of Nelson Mandela, he must release Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners unconditionally." (The ANC's concern is certainly justified. I am no so sure, however, about their response. The unconditional release of Mandela should not be counterposed to the unconditional release of all other political prisoners. The one would be a great boost to the other.)

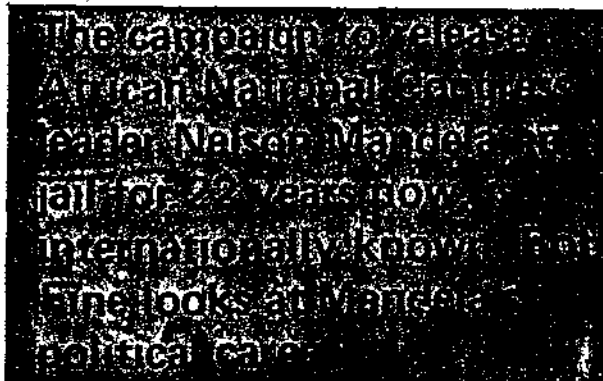
Who is Mandela? What was his political role in the liberation struggle? Who was the man behind the image?

He was the son of a chief in rural Transkei. He received a privileged education (compared to most blacks) at a Methodist school and Fort Hare College, where his political life began.

He is said to have rebelled against his family's attempt to arrange a marriage and returned to Johannesburg, where he studied law at Witwatersrand and then practised law with the current leader of the ANC, Oliver Tambo.

He was a middle class African who rebelled against the condition of the African nation.

Mandela joined the ANC in 1944 as a



member of the radical Youth League. The ANC was a highly conservative organisation at this time, dominated by chiefs, legalistic in the extreme, thoroughly alienated from the working class.

During the war, for instance, they opposed all industrial action by black workers on the general grounds that they were illegal and would hamper the war effort. This was also the general position taken by the South African Communist Party. Doctor Xuma, the head of the ANC, took little interest even in the Mineworkers' strike of 1946.

The Youth League, of which Mandela was soon a leading member, was in favour of mass mobilisation and campaigns, but its political direction was African Nationalist rather than socialist. Its 1944 manifesto, which Mandela helped to write, declared that it was 'imperative for the African to view his problems and those of his country through the perspective of Race'.

It spoke of 'the national cause' of Africans, the need to impart to the ANC 'a truly national character', a belief in 'the divine destiny of nations', a rejection of 'foreign leadership and ideologies' and the unity of all Africans. It sought co-operation with Indian and Coloured national organisations. It saw South Africa as a country of four nationalities and claimed the right of 'African self-determination'.

It drew back, however, from the racism which it associated with Marcus Garvey's slogans of 'Africa for the Africans' and 'Hurl the white man into the sea'. It described itself as offering a 'moderate' nationalism which was 'not against the European as a human being — but irrevocably opposed to white domination'.

Class

There was little or no class perspective in the Youth League's Africanism. Mandela himself voted for the expulsion of Communists, even though the position of the CP in its support for the South African war effort and its opposition to industrial or community activism during the war hardly displayed a deep class loyalty.

The defeat of the African miners' strike in 1946 was a terrible blow for the movement as a whole but especially so for the black working class.

On the side of the rulers, it paved the way for the defeat of Smuts' segregationist United Party and the rise to power of the hardline apartheid Nationalists in 1948.

On the side of the ruled, it paved the way for more militant forms of nationalism, expressed in the Youth League's take-over of the ANC, the 1949 Programme of Action, and a closer alliance between African, Asian and Coloured nationalist groups and the Contin-

ist Party.

The Programme of Action claimed the 'right of self-determination' for African people and the use of 'boycott, strike, civil disobedience, non-cooperation' to realise it. No independent working class voice was to be heard in this programme.

The CP increasingly subordinated itself to nationalism, particularly after it disbanded itself following the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act. The trade union movement was at a low ebb.

"No easy walk to freedom". This was the title of Mandela's presidential address to the Transvaal ANC in 1953. The phrase was borrowed from Nehru.

Uncompromising

Mandela had been 'volunteer-in-chief' of the Defiance Campaign, a campaign in which 8500 people had openly defied the government's race laws and suffered the penalty.

Mandela wrote of it: "Defiance was a step of great political significance. It released strong social forces...it was an effective way of getting the masses to function politically...a powerful method of voicing our indignation...one of the best ways of exerting pressure on the government...it inspired and aroused our people from a conquered and servile community of yesmen to a militant and uncompromising band of comrades-in-arms".

The campaign relied on self-sacrifice and was already winding down when the government introduced whipping and five years' imprisonment for acts of defiance. At this point the stream of volunteers dried up.

The campaign had great impact in arousing a moral conscience against apartheid, but it did not succeed in securing the repeal of any of the six or seven 'unjust laws' it was aimed at. More important, it offered little to the urban working class beyond the role of adorning onlookers.

For black workers violation of the law was an everyday necessity and their concern was to avoid the clutches of the police. Many must have been bemused as the volunteers offered themselves up to the police.

The non-violence of the Defiance Campaign was also a problem for workers. When in opposition to the recommendations of the ANC violent riots broke out in the Eastern Cape and a number of Africans were shot dead, the response of the ANC was to deny any responsibility.

As a leading Trotskyist of the time, Baruch Hirson, commented: "The philosophy of passive resistance is one that flows from a middle class leadership which places no reliance on the masses...It is a glorification of leaders and elevates them as political martyrs...it stems from the religious philosophy that there can be a moral re-

awakening of the rulers and it calls in effect for negotiations and concessions that exclude the broad mass of the people."

Mandela was not unaware of the problems. He wrote: "A political movement must keep in touch with reality...Long speeches, the shaking of fists, the banging of tables and strongly worded resolutions...do not bring about mass actions and can do a great deal of harm."

He also advocated the need to "fight unreservedly for the recognition of African trade unions" and called upon the ANC to "make the greatest possible contact with working people". Workers, however, were not seen as an independent force but as one element of the people's struggle.

"Freedom in our lifetime" was the slogan Mandela attached to the Freedom Charter approved by the 1955 Congress of the People. This provided the formal basis of the popular alliance between African, Asian, Coloured and White parties to the Congress Alliance. In his review of the charter, Mandela emphasised its multi-racialism: "For the first time in the history of our country the democratic forces irrespective of race, ideological conviction, party affiliation or religious belief have renounced and discarded racialism". It was a great step forward in this respect, but Mandela underplayed the degree of racialism still present in an alliance based on racial groups and oriented to a future society based on "equal status...for all national groups and races".

The formal character of the Alliance as a coalition between races also obscured its class composition, that it was an alliance across classes. Mandela, however, stressed approvingly its non-socialist nature: "It is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state but a programme for the unification of various classes and groupings among the people on a democratic basis...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".

To all the classes, he argued, the struggle for democratic rights offered definite advantages. What was important was unity. "The united front".

Alliance and unity were certainly necessary, but on whose terms? What was really at issue in the coming years was the class leadership of the movement; was it to be by workers or by the radical petty bourgeoisie? Although Mandela saw that "the workers are the principal force upon which the democratic movement must rely", the strategies, tactics and goals of the movement were in no way determined by the working class.

Election

A clear illustration came in the Election Strike of 1958. Mandela argued — totally correctly in my view — that boycott is an "effective and powerful weapon" but not a principle.

He wrote: "Some people regard the boycott as a matter of principle which must be applied invariably at all times...This is a serious mistake, for the boycott is in no way a matter of principle but a tactical weapon". Some people, Mandela continued, "regard participation in the system of separate racial representation in any shape or form" as impermissible.

This "inflexible principle" was also an error. It was vital to distinguish between "participation in elections by the people who accept racial discrimination...and participation...in order to exploit them in the interests of the liberatory struggle".

In principle, Mandela was absolutely

right. Unfortunately, the occasion was not.

Instead of pursuing demands for a pound a day and the end to the pass laws coming from within the ranks of the unions and instead of pursuing the militant anti-pass campaigns of the women's federation, Mandela called for participation in the white elections in favour of the United Party and against the Nationalists on the grounds that defeat of the Nationalists was the top priority.

The campaign backfired badly and the strike in support of the United Party was a flop. In the event, the Nationalists galloped home while the UP drifted ever more to the right.

The failure of the Election Strike fuelled a new burst of Africanism and boycottism in the form of the Pan African Congress, which split off from the ANC.

Trial

In 1960 Mandela offered his testimony at the Treason Trial. The government had arrested 156 political leaders following the adoption of the Freedom Charter, charging them with participation in a treasonable conspiracy, inspired by international communism, to overthrow the state by violent means.

The trial dragged on for over four years, the last of the defendants being acquitted in 1961...It served its purpose, however, in exhausting the financial and mental energies of the movement at a crucial time.

The court gave considerable space for political statements. Mandela reassured his commitment to universal adult franchise, his distance from Communism and his non-racialism: "we are not anti-white, we are against white supremacy."

After his release, Mandela was heavily involved in the mass actions which followed the Sharpeville shooting. This was a tumultuous time in South African history, when tens of thousands of workers went on strike and took to the streets.

The Congress Alliance was not prepared for this level of working class militancy. It either left it to its own resources or made inappropriate calls for Days of Mourning and Stay-at-Homes which drew workers back from initiatives already taken. In 1961, for example, Mandela was still approaching the United Party, offering support to their opposition to the declaration of a Republic.

When the ANC finally called a general strike, it was far too late, the workers exhausted by their heroic efforts. It was also probably on the wrong issue. What was the Declaration of a Republic, the abolition of any position for Britain's Queen, to most blacks?

Mandela celebrated the response still forthcoming in the strike of May 1961; denounced the massive mobilisation of the state to quell it; attacked the opportunism of the PAC and pondered the question of the movement's non-violence: "Is it politically correct to continue preaching peace and non-violence when dealing with a government whose barbaric practices have brought suffering and misery to Africans?"

The truth is that non-violence was never an option for the mass of black workers.

Mandela went underground to organise the May Stay-at-home. From there he issued the ANC calls for "a countrywide campaign of non-cooperation with the government".

The plan, he said, was to "make government impossible". But the workers had already suffered a defeat. The strikes were over. Pass burning had turned into queues for

new passes. The government itself had severed the possibility of cooperation.

The ANC turned to armed struggle in the form of a sabotage organisation, Umkhonto We Sizwe (Spear of the Nation). Although it broke through the bounds of pacifism and legality, its guerrillaist orientation cut against the mass organisation of workers. Instead, reliance was to be placed on small groups of armed men infiltrating into the country.

Mandela, known as the Black Pimpernel, was picked up and tried for incitement to strike illegally. At the trial in which he defended himself, he challenged the validity of the court.

He was "a black man in a white court" and could not expect a fair and proper trial. He was not "morally bound to obey laws made by a Parliament in which I have no representation".

His case was democratic: "equality before the law means the right to participate in the making of the laws by which one is governed, a constitution which guarantees democratic rights to all sections of the population." He appealed to the Universal Declaration of human rights. The will of the people, he said, is the basis of the authority of government.

Mandela gave his African nationalism a radical democratic content: "all people, irrespective of the national groups to which they belong... whose home is South Africa and who believe in the principles of democracy and equality, should be treated as Africans". The problem in South Africa was "the conflict between conscience and law."

The government set the scene for violence and this could do "only one thing and that is breed counter-violence." These were the terrible choices he and his people faced.

Mandela was convicted only to reappear on sabotage charges at the Rivonia trial. Here he declared that "violence by the African people had become inevitable" and that "without violence there would be no way open to the African people... All lawful modes of expressing opposition... had been closed by legislation. There was no choice, it was a question of 'submit or fight'."

Violence was to be kept to the minimum, sabotage against property not terrorism against persons.

The object as far as he was concerned was not communism or a classless society, but rather the attainment of democratic rights: "I regard the British Parliament", he said, "as the most democratic institution in the world and the independence and impartiality of its judiciary never fail to arouse my admiration."

Turn

Mandela never explored the particular form in which "the turn to armed struggle" was conducted in South Africa: its alienation from workers and mass struggles, its exclusivity, its cult of violence as the way forward. He never was able to investigate the reasons for the terrible defeats in the 1960s at the hands of the South African security forces nor of its connection with the annihilation of mass struggle in this period.

He never really understood working class politics or the class reasons for the defeats of the movement suffered at the point of his imprisonment. It was not for ten years or more that black workers found their feet again in the strikes of 1973.

In the wake of this movement Mandela has returned to the centre of the political stage, not as representative but as symbol. He has not been forgotten in jail and he will not be.



"From his prison cell Mandela has become an embodiment of black resistance . . . But he never really understood working class politics or the class reasons for the defeats suffered at the time of his imprisonment."

Letter

Black unions and the ANC

I would like to take up Bob Fine on two historical points in his article on Nelson Mandela in a recent issue.

When you mention that Mandela and others voted for the expulsion of the Communist Party from the African National Congress you forget to give the reasons. The South African CP supported the Afrikaner Nationalists, not only during the Hitler-Stalin Pact period, but also again in the immediate prelude to Dr Malan's accession to power.

Though by the time that Mandela voted for the expulsion, the CP and the ANC were, as you say, both supporting the Smuts government's war efforts, the ANC did so with considerably less enthusiasm and without making the same whole-sale compromises. It is easy to understand that the ANC would have been bitter at Stalinist policy in the immediately preceding period.

You also don't mention that many members of the South African CP resigned from the party over the issue. Indeed it has been claimed that a majority of members did. The ANC expulsions were in a sense part of a split in the SACP.

There were several accounts of this written in the '50s. Off-hand the only person I can recall as being one of the Communists who resigned and then sided with the ANC is Fr. Michael Scott, who later founded the Africa Bureau (the same Fr. Michael Scott who was a co-sponsor of the Committee of 100).

I am fairly certain that all the then black members of the SACP were among those who left.

When you talk about the divorce between the early ANC

and trade unionism you seem to forget three points:

There were trade unions founded in the '20s, and though the founders were members of the ANC, they were not leading members.

There was an attempt, in which the ANC was an active sponsor, to unite the unions, the ANC and other organisations in an African Convention. The fact that it broke down was by no means exclusively the fault of the ANC.

Right up until the war, indeed in the mines until this day, the majority of black workers were/are hired on a six months contract system. In the '20s this system was run with chiefs sending a son or sub-chief and a party of tribesman, under contract, to the employer.

The temporary nature of contract employment would militate against trade unionism and the fact that such gangs were led by representatives of tribal chiefs would mean that only if socialists were prepared to take the class struggle into the tribe themselves and in so doing break down the only organs of black power there were, was a class based trade unionism possible.

I have never heard of any socialists in the '20s who were prepared to present such a direct challenge to tribalism. After the '20s the tribes were under assault from the white establishment and quisling tribal chiefs were being appointed (which is why trade unionism started then) and why the ANC had links to the old tribal structure, then began, albeit as a side issue, to approve of and sponsor trade unions.

Fraternally,
LAURENS OTTER

WORKERS AGAINST APARTHEID



INTERNAL resistance against the apartheid regime in South Africa has been growing apace. There are almost daily reports of strikes, boycotts, sabotage and riot by the oppressed majority.

The state's response so far this year has been to shoot dead over three hundred blacks, to murder at least three in custody, to arrest thousands and to expel thousands more back to the so-called "homelands". South Africa has entered a new period of intensified struggle.

Closely allied with the South African Communist Party, the African National Congress is a leading wing of the national liberation movement. It is now planning the first Consultative Conference since its Morogoro conference in 1969. Things have changed dramatically since 1969.

Then the liberation movement as a whole was at a low point. Internal resistance in South Africa had all but disappeared since 1961, the turn to armed struggle having proved to be a terrible failure. The campaign for international sanctions had made no headway against the lures of lucrative foreign investment in South Africa.

Today the situation is entirely different and far more hopeful.

Trade unions

An independent trade union movement has arisen out of the ashes of the movement defeated in the 1960s. Organising black workers in the industrial and commercial heartlands of South Africa and now well entrenched within the mines, the trade union movement has become a major force for change.

Numerous community and student groups have been reborn and formed themselves into two national organisations.

The one, the United Democratic Front, is a multi-racial grouping in the tradition of the old Congress Alliance and now with the policies of the ANC, Mandela and the Freedom Charter.

The other is a black-consciousness movement called the National Forum, whose most important component is AZAPO, the Azanian People's Organisation (Azania is the "African" name for South Africa). This movement has picked up a large number of black socialists.

In addition, there are organisations like the Cape Action League, which has inherited the mantle of the old "Trotskyist" Unity Movement. Radical literature, meetings, slogans and campaigns abound in South Africa in a way that must stretch the credulity of those whose image of South Africa was formed in the dark days of the 1960s.

For South Africa's rulers there have also been great changes. Economically, South Africa is caught within the constraints of world recession. Profits are down. International

markets for primary and manufactured consumer products are more intensely competitive and difficult. An underlying balance of payments deficit caused by the import of capital goods and new technology has been offset only by banking loans. The strength of the dollar has caused the value of gold to drop. Inflation is high, lay-offs are common and unemployment (stated to be around three million for blacks) is rising.

The multinational monopolies which dominate the South African economy are putting pressure on the South African state to contain the black unrest and restore profitability. In response, a state policy has evolved that combines highly significant "reforms" with increasing authoritarianism.

In 1981 a labour law reform was initiated which extended the legal sphere of operation of black trade unions. The state intended to control and incorporate trade unions by subjecting them to an official framework, but the result of these reforms has been the considerable strengthening of the movement.

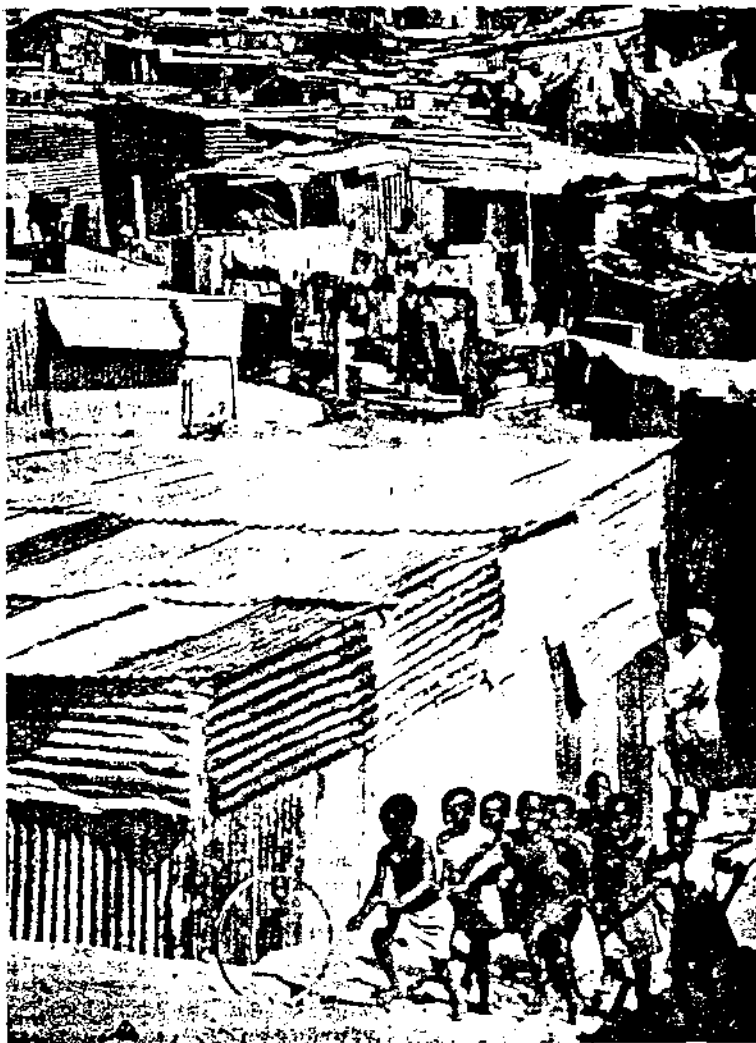
In 1980 the government announced its constitutional reforms. It set up a tripartite parliament, one house for whites, one for Asians and one for Coloureds. Africans were not included on the ground that Africans already had their own self-government in the Bantustans. At the same time, the government consolidated the power of the state executive and military and put off the next general election at least until 1989.

The elections for the Coloured and Asian assemblies were successfully boycotted, although enough Coloureds and Asians voted to lend the new arrangement some credibility.

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

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

More recently the Mixed



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

Reforms

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

South African citizenship is to be granted to Africans living in the Bantustans. The law banning representatives of one "racial" group from interfering in the political affairs of another

(which, for example, meant that Asian representatives were not permitted to discuss white affairs, etc.), has been repealed.

Reforms like these have been accompanied by terrible acts of state brutality. The worst was at Langa in March of this year when the police opened fire on a peaceful funeral procession commemorating the 25th anniversary of the 1960 massacre at Sharpeville.

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

An executive member of FOSATU (the Federation of South African Trade Unions), Andries Radebe, died one hour after being released from custody, from severe head injuries. A student leader, Sipho Mutsi, died in custody shortly after. A thousand soldiers and police sealed off Kwanobude, a black township in the Eastern Cape on May 6

and killed three more black people. And so it continues.

In the face of conflicting pressures, the white polity itself has split apart. Although the ruling Nationalist Party under Botha has strengthened its grip on government and continues to win support in the white polls, for several years now it has been faced with opposition from a right-wing breakaway movement called the HNP, led by a man named Treurnicht.

The HNP has been gaining support among whites disenchanted with a policy of concessions, and squeezed in a declining economy between black workers below and the monopolies above. It seems that this right-wing movement has won a considerable following within the police and the army.

It would be a mistake, in my view, to pass off the government's reforms as a mere deception covering up the unchanging reality of apartheid. So keen



Clockwise from left: Crossroads & funeral in the Eastern Cape; Gold School students' revolt, Soweto 15 Durban.

have militants in the liberation struggle been to disassociate themselves from reformism that they have sometimes been blind to the very real changes in the terrain of struggle that have been taking place.

Change

One example out of many: Tribune commented: "Sharpeville 1960. Uitenhage 1965. Nothing has changed in 25 years... Progress... liberalisation... are nothing but a sham" (29/3/85). Certainly, apartheid continues to be a brutal reality, but it is also true that black struggles over the last decade or more have brought about significant changes and opened up new opportunities for the movement.



The image of apartheid most often portrayed by the anti-apartheid movement and still most common within popular consciousness is that of absolute power directed to the oppression of black people with such efficacy that no resistance is possible. The socialist version of this image portrays apartheid as playing a central and essential part in capital accumulation and the exploitation of labour in South Africa. What both these images miss, however, are the contradictions which run through apartheid, just as they run through every capitalist order.

These contradictions are coming to a head with the growth of internal resistance, with the world economic crisis and with the changing demands of

capital. The apartheid state has not remained static in the face of these major shifts. The 'reforms' are not a mere sham, but part of a serious attempt on the part of the South African rulers to adapt to the new situation.

Fraught

As the ruling class are well aware, any programme of reforms is fraught with danger, in particular the danger that black workers will take advantage of these tinkering to fight for fundamental change. That, in essence, is what is now taking place.

If we simply deny that there is a process of 'liberalisation', we will obscure reality and fail to comprehend what is happening, how it is happening and precisely why it is now happening in this particular way.

Beneath the political surface of reform and repression, the state is attempting, more or less successfully so far, a programme of restructuring aimed at restoring conditions of profitability. The Financial Times recently summed up some aspects of the economic problem

facing South African capital:

"In every one of the last five years government spending has overshot its budgeted target, frequently by a large margin. Over-reliance on gold to bail the economy out, a plethora of control boards, over-restrictive building regulations, subsidies to farmers, 'strategic industries' and consumers, and the costs of administering apartheid in all its forms, have saddled the economy with a mass of distortions. These have raised costs and reduced productivity to the extent that inflation at 16% (and still rising) is three times the average of South Africa's partners. The low dollar price of gold and the three year drought, which this year broke in the nick of time, have posed two straws which nearly broke the back of the economy and contributed to the 40% depreciation of the rand in 15 months." (FT, 10 S. 45).

Manoeuvre

This is roughly how the problem looks to the ruling South African capitalist class. The solution which it seeks follows the familiar road of monetarism,

at least as far as cuts in public expenditure are concerned.

The new Finance Minister, Barend du Plessis, has imposed restrictive budgets to cut state expenditure. But he has very little room for manoeuvre. White workers, especially white women workers, are beginning to feel the pinch of unemployment.

International

Cuts in food subsidies aggravate the anger of black workers. Cuts in central government spending force black councillors to raise rents and thus undercut the government's policy of incorporating a small black middle class. Spending on the arms and police can only expand

The international front is a major dimension of the South African picture. In the USA an energetic Free South Africa Movement has gripped the black and radical imagination and posed a challenge to Reagan's inherited policy of 'constructive engagement' with the apartheid regime.

While Reagan has established an investment office in Johannesburg, backs IMF loans to South Africa, supports continued US training of the South African coast guard and endorses the export to South Africa of 2,500 US made electric shock batons, US opponents of the apartheid regime have been demonstrating and mobilising for sanctions against South Africa.

Congress has passed legislation banning all further bank

loans to South Africa, banning new investment by new US companies, and banning nuclear and military computer sales.

At the time of writing it is not clear whether the president will veto this legislation. In over 40 US state legislatures proposals have been introduced demanding disinvestment from banks involved in South Africa. Manufacturers' Hanover Bank has refused for the present to grant any further loans to South Africa. When we consider that in 1984 the USA was responsible for 20% of all foreign investment in South Africa — over \$15 billion — big money is at stake.

We don't yet know how effective such moves will be. Some people are treating it as window-dressing. Why, after all should the conservative Foreign Relations Committee support such a bill? In part this is doubtless a reasonable objection. But the disinvestment campaign also links in with a US trend towards protectionism.

Take US steel for example. The New Statesman (5/4/85) showed how US production of steel declined by 50% between 1974 and 1982. In 1983 the seven largest steel producers lost \$2.7 billion. The result is high redundancy at home and high investment abroad. Steel imports now amount to over one-fifth of domestic production.

US labour

Since 1975 US imports of South African steel have gone up 5000%, albeit from a very low base. Chicago's Southworks Steel (owned by US Steel) laid off several thousand workers while Chicago's new state office bought its steel beams from ISCOR, the South African steel company. This purchase was funded by loans from the Illinois Bank which itself operates in South Africa.

Perhaps — and this is speculation — it was protectionist fervour which excited US labour movement support for sanctions against South Africa — the AFL-CIO favours sanctions — and from Senator Lugar, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, representing capital.

Whatever the motives, US sanctions can only aggravate the economic difficulties already faced by the apartheid regime. The refusal of San Francisco longshoremen (dockers) to unload South African cargo represents a real step forward in international solidarity, even though the spirit of nationalist protectionism probably played a part in generating it.

Ireland

In Ireland a similar act of solidarity has taken place. May Manning who works for a supermarket chain in Dublin, refused to crash up South African fruit, in line with instructions from her union (the Irish Administrative and Distributive Trade Union). She was suspended by management and all 12 full-time workers at the shop have been on strike for over six months demanding her reinstatement.

To be continued

THE POWER TO SMASH APARTHEID

The organisation and mobilisation of blacks inside South Africa has now been taking place on a significant scale since 1973, after the previous decade of defeat.

How have the various sections of the black resistance movement responded to the changes in the apartheid state's policies and to the spontaneous militancy of black workers and students? Naturally, each section has responded in line with its own political heritage.

The African National Congress has had great difficulties in adapting itself to a struggle in which the focus is not on sabotage from without nor on international sanctions, but on internal resistance.

ANC

Now ANC President Oliver Tambo writes of a pre-revolutionary situation: "a very rare combination of revolutionary factors are maturing. If the liberation movement seizes this very important moment and builds upon it, the prospects of people's power is within our sight".

He sees the convergence of three factors. First, "a regime and a ruling class in deep economic and political crisis, perhaps the deepest in [its] history". Second, "ferment among the people who are showing that they want not reform but a revolutionary solution". And third, "a movement exists with an organised following to guide the build-up to victory".

At the same time, he pragmatically keeps open other possibilities: "the idea of a general insurrection as an immediate way forward cannot replace the long-term perspective of protracted people's war. We must keep lines open to other possibilities".

The main criticism aimed at the ANC in the past has been that it substituted armed struggle for political organisation inside the country. The result of their armed struggle strategies was disaster, both on the armed and on the political fronts. Now Tambo is saying that it is necessary to "combine armed struggle with political mass actions". At the same time as accelerating the armed struggle.

This means "less concern over civilian casualties" as far as the sabotage campaign is concerned. Tambo is calling for preparation for "a long general

Bob Fine concludes his article on South Africa by looking at perspectives for working class politics

strike", the turning of black townships into no-go areas by the action of small bands of armed youth, a call to black soldiers and policemen to quit their jobs and the institution of "people's committees" as alternatives to the black councils.

He hailed the two-day general strike in November as evidence of "a very substantial shift on the part of workers toward acceptance of the view that they must be part of popular mass struggle".

In my view the ANC's analysis is not precise enough. First, the idea of "people's power" is no more than a rhetorical device used to cover and obscure important differences which exist between the various sections of the "people" and it says nothing about the form of state for which the ANC is fighting.

Second, this is not the first time that the South African ruling class has entered into deep crisis, 1946, 1960 and 1976 were other such occasions, and each of them in the end proved to be a springboard for the recovery of the ruling class. On this occasion there is little evidence as yet that the ruling class are anywhere near being unable to rule.

Suspicious

Third, many black people are by no means convinced — and often for good reason — that the ANC represents their interests or can act as an effective leadership for them. This is the lesson of many years' experience of the ANC downgrading the day to day economic struggles of workers and of the trade unions. Many are suspicious of the ANC's efforts to subject all black organisations to their own leadership and direction.

Inside the country there are three principal forces at work and to some considerable extent in conflict with one another. The UDF (United Democratic Front) is a broad front of all who may

be opposed to apartheid. It comprises a coalition of 645 affiliated groups and claims a membership of over two million — though the UDF's attempt to gain a million signatures for its petition to free Mandela fell far short of its target.

It is formally a non-racial grouping and has attracted a number of leading liberal figures like Bishop Tutu to its ranks.

UDF

It has not managed to win over the bulk of the organised working class, however — most of the trade union movement fearing for its independence were it to join. The UDF's own organisational structures seem rather weak. It took a major role in the boycott of the new constitution but certainly not a dominant or even a leading role. It adheres to the politics of the ANC and the Freedom Charter and espouses its popular front policies.

Within the UDF, however, as one would expect, there are all kinds of diverse views. At present about 40 UDF leaders are charged with treason and other serious offences, especially support for the ANC which remains a banned organisation.

It is unlikely that most trade unions would join the UDF unless the workers' numbers were reflected in the decision-making structures of the Front. At present this is not the case.

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

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

It has within it some fine intellectuals, like Neville Alexander who, under the name of No Sizwe wrote a fine critique of the nationalist politics of the ANC called "One Azania, One Nation". What links its various threads together is, partly, a common negative opposition to what they term as "charterism" — emphasis on the ANC's South African Freedom Charter which they tend to think of as contaminated by liberalism; and partly a common commitment to non-cooperation with or boycott of all state institutions.

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

A flavour of what separates them from the UDF can be gained from their respective handling of Kennedy's recent visit. The UDF acted as Kennedy's host and expects much from his support for the sanctions campaign in the States. The NF boycotted Kennedy and on a number of occasions blocked him from speaking.

Riots

During the recent spate of riots there has been no love lost between supporters of the UDF and of the NF. Several killings and firebombings were reported.

The third major force inside South Africa is the black workers trade union movement. This movement too is disunited.

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

In recent years the trade

union movement has managed to build and consolidate among black industrial, commercial and now mining workers. It has made significant strides toward forming a united trade union movement (that could mature in the next few months).

The trade unions have also engaged much more actively than in the past in political struggles, taking a major role in the boycott of the new elections, leading and providing the muscle behind the two-day stay-at-home in November, in which more than half a million workers participated — Johannesburg was entirely paralysed — and offering a working class political perspective which is nowhere else to be found.

These are the three major contending groupings as things now stand.

Issues

It is important not to confuse the jostlings for power and advantage by competing petty bourgeois groups, each laying claim to leadership, with the real class issues that face the movement.

The big underlying question in the liberation struggle is the relation between the working class and the liberation movement as a whole, between socialism and nationalism, between the fight against apartheid and the fight for socialism, between working class forms of struggle and forms of struggle which leave the working class as bystanders applauding their champions.

All parties now speak formally of the leading role of the black working class. The problem is to give this content.

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

The UDF and NF leaders tend to "represent" their constituencies in a much lesser way, much less structured, than the trade union leaders, who put high emphasis on trade union democracy. During and after the stay-away, FOSATU represen-

tatives on the united front that organised it found themselves somewhat compromised by statements about no-go zones and the like put out by some of their colleagues. Perhaps this explains why further calls on workers to stay away from work have not been notably successful.

Workers cannot be pulled in and out like puppets, and South African history has many examples to prove this. Workers also stand to lose not just their jobs but their right to reside in an area where jobs are to be found, when they strike. They want to know that the reason is good and that their organisation is good. It is too easy to declare workers backward when they fail to perform what others want of them or, alternatively, to unconprehendingly idealise them as ever-ready to take militant action. After the two-day stay-away all 5400 SASOL workers were sacked and sent back to their homelands (though some were subsequently re-employed).

One of the most significant areas of trade union development at the moment is in the gold mines. For the Economist (10/5/85) this is where the real action is.

In mid-March the NUM demanded a general 10% rise; two weeks later it declared an official dispute. 400 union members were immediately dismissed and negotiations flopped. The following night 14,000 workers, almost the entire underground force in the Vaal Reef gold mine, owned by the giant Anglo-American, failed to turn up.

The dispute spilled over into a neighbouring mine. Every striker, 17,000 in all, was sacked by Anglo and bussed back to the "homelands". Two bombs exploded in Anglo's Johannesburg office on April 30. Since then negotiations have been resumed.

NUM

The NUM is now seeking a 40% increase across the board, plus danger money and abolition of job reservation. Anglo are offering 15% at most for blacks (below the rate of inflation) and 9.5% for white miners (the white, and poisonously racist, MWU has also declared a dispute).

Since Gavin Rally took over direction of Anglo from the "liberal" Harry Oppenheimer, Anglo has been taking an

"The largest and most powerful working class in Africa"

increasingly hard line, closing the liberal Rand Daily Mail (for supposedly financial reasons) and now taking on the very union which the company had originally invited into their mines. The dispute is still to be decided.

Such are the forces at work. We should not downplay the influence of the black bourgeoisie: of the homelands chiefs like Buthelesi and Matanzima, whose supporters have entered into bitter and lethal fights recently with township workers; and of the Asian and Coloured representatives who now sit in parliament and are claiming credit for the reforms. None of them are going to surrender their new-found power easily.

Deal?

There is talk from the government of a deal with the ANC — thus the offer to release Mandela: if he would publicly eschew violence, Mandela refused and so too have the ANC. But offers of some kind of federal deal may well be on the table, with the Buthelesis and Matanzimas acting as go-betweens. Such a solution would offer little or nothing to the struggles of black workers.

The situation is a confused one. It will take more than sabotage or American sanctions, or student riots to overturn what is still a night's regime. What is at issue is not only whether apartheid can be overturned but also with what it is to be replaced.

The black working class of South Africa, by far the largest and most powerful in Africa, may well be presented with the opportunity not merely to replace a repressive colonial rule with a repressive rule of the black bourgeoisie, but to create a socialist and democratic South Africa which would doubtless serve as a catalyst for all Africa. Such a prospect is not imminent, but the current battles may well be crucial in determining the place of the working class in the struggle as a whole.

Thus, in my opinion, will be determined by whether or not the trade union movement — which is at present the major organisational focus of black workers — has the capacity to construct out of their own ranks, and in conjunction with other socialists, a working class political movement. As ever this is easier to advocate than to achieve.



"The big underlying question is the relationship between the working class and the liberation movement..."

A workers' party based on the unions

The new, independent non-racial trade unions pose huge problems for South African capitalists, and for their state.

Under normal conditions, individual capitalists and capitalist governments can count upon being able to diffuse workers' struggles by relying on a trade union bureaucracy heavily shaped by its dealings in the corridors of power and channels of negotiation, and to a large extent cut off from the needs and mood of the rank and file.

No such bureaucracy exists in the new unions. They have concentrated on building up strong rank-and-file organisation, shop stewards structures and direct worker involvement. Strict accountability of leaders — who are to obtain mandates from their members for all that they do — has helped prevent the leaders from being coopted by industrial conciliation bureaucracy.

Even where unions have participated in industrial councils [negotiation boards with management] it has been on the basis of strict rank-and-file control over representatives, and freedom to pursue their interests at a local level.

Many unions have kept their distance from the main political opposition group, the pro-ANC United Democratic Front. Despite overtones of narrow trade unionism, such distance is good.

The UDF deserves our full support against apartheid. But it is a typical popular-front national liberation movement, with a programme for a capitalist South Africa, and Stalinist controlled.

The working class needs its own political voice, independent from the ANC or the UDF. Such a voice — a new, working class party — could be built on the independent unions, the NUM, FOSATU and the Council of Unions of South Africa.



Arrest under the pass laws

The 'National Forum' is a major force in the South African liberation movement, alongside the United Democratic Front and the non-racial trade unions.

Embracing many currents which come from the black consciousness movement, it now sets its aim as a socialist revolution.

In this interview — given in early August, soon after the declaration of the state of emergency — a leader of the National Forum argues that South Africa is 'a classic situation of permanent revolution' (where the working class takes the lead in a democratic revolution and merges it with a socialist revolution). The interview is translated and abridged from the German socialist paper *Was Tun*.

How did this revolt start, and what are its centres?

The revolt has economic and political reasons. I would put the political reasons in first place.

Not only the Blacks, but also the great majority of the Coloureds and Indians, rejected the new constitution. But when in the constitution the government excluded those classified as Blacks from any political representation, it drove the urban black youth into revolt.

On top of that you have the economic misery and the intensive politicisation of black society. The black school students' movement has played a leading role in this.

Their militant stance, of course, goes back a long way in South African history: the Soweto uprising was initially a school students' movement. They demand a better education system which offers the blacks similar possibilities to the whites. But now they are going far beyond this demand and are aiming for a socialist-oriented education.

Another big factor is that most school students can get no work after school. In the eastern province the unemployment rate is almost 40%.

Is the movement restricted to the cities?

No, although there have been no uprisings on the land like in the cities, perhaps with the exception of the eastern province.

The movement draws in the contract workers working for white farmers, and the miners, of course. And poverty and hunger are much worse in the countryside than in the cities. I think that an explosion is brewing, especially in the so-called 'resettlement camps', which are a sort of concentration camps.

These camps may become the starting point for guerrilla or other action against the regime, like the Palestinian refugee camps. They are the result of a policy that has turned more and more Blacks into wage-workers, but wants to stop them becoming urbanised.

ion movement play in this revolt?

Without a doubt the trade union movement has played an important, in many respects decisive, role.

The strikes that began in September in the 'Vaal triangle', the industrial area of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, and which flowed into a two-day regional strike in November, were the beginning of the revolt. This movement was led primarily by the two big black union federations, FOSATU and CUSA.

Until then FOSATU and CUSA had been able to avoid acting in too openly political a way so that the regime could attack them. After the strike some FOSATU unionists were arrested — they are now being charged with high treason.

Are the trade unions winning masses of new members?

Yes, especially among the miners.

The unions encourage their members to take part in political class-struggle actions in the townships, though indeed not as trade-unionists, because the South African government would then immediately ban them, but in civic committees and in spontaneous revolts.

Like Solidarnosc they try to avoid open political action as trade unions at the current stage. But many trade unionists think that a political workers' party must emerge from the trade union movement. In this respect too we have learned much from political experience. I think it is tactically right.

However, the trade union movement is very divided. I would distinguish three different groups. On the left there are the unions that consider themselves as belonging to the black consciousness movement.

In the middle there are the two big trade union federations that I mentioned, who now want to unite. Further to the right is the South African Congress of Trade Unions which is close to the ANC.

Great pressure is being exerted from left and from right on the federations in the

What role does the trade union movement play in this revolt?

"Many trade unionists think that a workers' party must emerge"

openly in a political way. They reject this and rightly, I think. At this time it would be organisational survival and would only lead to the arrest of their leaderships.

What are the differences between the two big alliances in the liberation movement, the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the National Forum?

Both originated about the same time in 1983.

The NF remained true to the original idea of building a common opposition of all forces that rejected the new constitution, the so-called 'New Deal'. The main organisations taking part in the NF were the Azania People's Organisation (AZAPO), the only legal national organisation of blacks, and the Cape Action League.

Both alliances are made up mainly of black workers. The workers are organised in the townships, and their organisations belong to one of the two alliances. The black petty bourgeoisie and intellectuals are also represented in both alliances.

In the UDF there are also bourgeois (mainly white) elements, liberals and business people with links to big capital. Of course the organisations of the National Forum also have white members from community organisations, student organisations, and trade unions; but not this bourgeois element.

CUSA, one of the two big black trade union federations, belongs both to the UDF and the NF.

The NF campaigned against the constitution much more seriously than the UDF, in which a right wing time and again proposed using the constitutional institutions as a platform for legal propaganda.

The basis of the NF is the 'Manifesto of the Azanian People', which is of course not a socialist programme, but in any case puts socialism on the agenda. On the other hand the UDF has not even been able to unite on the Freedom Charter, the ANC's 1955 manifesto for an anti-apartheid coalition.

We are ready for joint

work with the UDF, but not for a political alliance, because we reject collaboration with the liberals.

Consequently we rejected the visit of US Senator Edward Kennedy which the UDF welcomed. With that visit important capitalist circles in the US and in South Africa itself wanted to push the Botha government into reforms.

So is socialism on the agenda in the consciousness of the movement's activists?

Quite definitely. Obviously most people have no scientific, disciplined conception of socialism. But since about 1980 most activists have been clear that apartheid could only be removed by socialist solutions of some sort.

The trade unions on one side, the community organisations, tenants' organisations, etc. on the other, are building an organisational foundation for a socialist movement.

It is still not a workers' movement. There is still no workers' party, but the foundation for such a party has already been established.

And some member organisations of the NF, like the Black Alliance of Mining and Construction Workers' Unions, have already progressed very far on the road to a socialist strategy.

As against that, the old and new left belonging to the UDF start from the idea that the movement should not go beyond national and democratic goals - though there are socialist-orientated organisations affiliated to the UDF too.

The bourgeois camp, internationally and in South Africa itself, is split in its attitude to the Botha government. Some bourgeois forces in the US call for a boycott. How do you explain this?

The strategic situation in South Africa is differently assessed.

There are capitalist politicians who consider that the Afrikaner National party and the Botha government are the only force that can carry through reforms without endangering the system itself.

Others, further to the left,



Black strikers, Durban 1973

are on the contrary convinced that such a reform can be carried through only by the cooption of the moderate leadership of the African nationalist movement. And these forces, who are aiming for a new power bloc, propose an economic boycott.

Is such a reform solution possible, and is there a social basis for it?

Even so far-reaching a concession as legal equality can no longer integrate the blacks, above all the youth,

As against the national-democratic theoreticians of the UDF it must be maintained that the revolution in South Africa has a permanent character.

The caste system indeed implies that in time many

more Indians and Coloureds can be politically neutralised than blacks. The many black collaborators in the townships show, however, that fundamentally even classified Blacks can be neutralised.

On the other hand the youth of precisely these intermediate layers rejects this government and the new constitution most sharply, and takes part in the revolt. Other than repression the government has no means to solve the question of apartheid. It does not have enough time.

I believe that in the next five or ten years the capitalist powers of the West will see themselves forced to bring the moderate wing of the liberation movement to power somehow, as in Zimbabwe. But the attempt to put a limit to the movement by that means will fail.

Of course we cannot predict how the revolution will then proceed, but it is the classic situation of a permanent revolution.

Is South Africa on the eve of revolution?

In the National Forum we have tried to warn against two dangers since 1983: a premature uprising and a Latin-Americanisation of the country. Both are now threatening.

It was clear that a revolt was coming. It must be in the interest of the Botha government to provoke a premature outbreak of the revolt, so as to stifle it quicker and eliminate its leadership through a wave of arrests or through the state of emergency.

The precise moment may not be favourable for the government, because it is in

a very difficult situation economically. But there can be no doubt of the government's preparedness to impose the state of emergency.

This state of emergency will not last very long, but in that time organisations will be destroyed or have their leaderships removed, and it will take some years to build them up again. The aim of the state of emergency is a breathing-space in which the so-called 'reform movement' can be extended and the black middle class neutralised.

The moderate leadership of the United Democratic Front (UDF) did not think this wave of repression was possible. It assessed not only the international situation but also the relation of forces inside the country falsely and expected that the government would be forced into negotiations. In reality we are moving towards Latin American conditions.

That means that the regime allows a limited political debate so as then to remove the leadership that shows itself openly, either legally or illegally through death-squads - as has already begun with the murder of the oppositional lawyer Victoria Mxenge.

The movement should have prepared itself for this. But it is clear that the UDF and also parts of the National Forum and even the unions were not quite prepared for this wave of repression.

The unions will probably come out of it best, because they hold back from open revolutionary activity and have only carried on general political education among

their members.

But won't the brutal state intervention lead to a further politicisation and extension of the revolt?

Politicisation, yes, but not necessarily an extension of the open revolt.

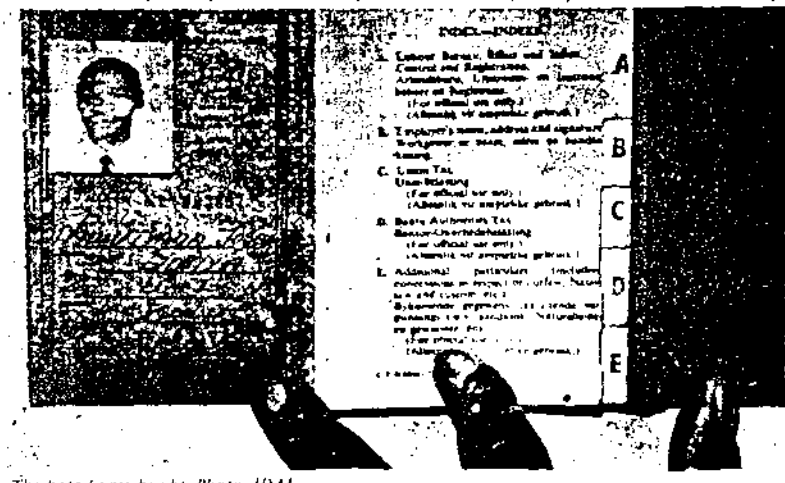
We are in a situation very similar to Northern Ireland. The government can forget, once and for all, the idea of bringing over the black youth and the black population to their side: integration is excluded.

But the workers cannot sustain an open revolt indefinitely in South Africa any more than they can anywhere else. There will continue to be sporadic revolts in the townships.

If we had an army, as in Iran in 1979, that was recruited from the 'sons of the people', then it would perhaps be possible today to talk about a successful revolution. But it will be years before we have such a situation. You can't talk about a successful revolution when you don't know how to neutralise the army and the bureaucracy. And they are still 85% white.

The government will not let the proportion of blacks in the state apparatus increase quickly, because it knows that is their own power-base. Anyone who says that a successful revolution is possible in the next two or three years does not understand the situation.

It would be different if an international war neutralised the army in South Africa and gave us the opportunity to come to power. But no neighbouring state is strong enough even to threaten South Africa.



The hated pass books. Photo: IDAF

Why a workers' party?

Socialist Worker Review has attacked Socialist Organiser for proposing that the South African trades unions should organise an independent workers' party. Tom Rigby responds to Alex Callinicos.

Socialist Worker Review has launched an attack on Socialist Organiser in response to our call for an independent workers' party in South Africa. Alex Callinicos writes:

"Any such quasi-syndicalist strategy fails to confront the fact that the mass of black trade unionists are likely to look towards either the ANC or the black consciousness movement for political leadership. African nationalism can only be challenged politically."

Apart from the basic absurdity of describing a call for the formation of a political party as 'syndicalist', Callinicos's article brings out more or less explicitly the bedrock of the SWP's politics.

For Socialist Worker the only way in which it is possible to challenge the leadership of the mass movement — whether the Labour Party in Britain, or South Africa's ANC — is to build an 'alternative' through low-level propaganda and one-by-one recruitment to a self-proclaimed 'revolutionary' party.

Necessary

Well, a revolutionary party is necessary. In South Africa right now a working class revolution is possible according to the classic pattern of the permanent revolution — a revolution in which the working class combines with and leads the rural poor in a joint movement against reaction in the course of which the working class fights for workers' power. For this potential development to become a practical possibility, a revolutionary working class party, like the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, is necessary. The tragedy is that it doesn't exist.

What exists in South Africa is a Stalinist party exerting a heavy influence on the ANC. The Stalinist party is opposed to the programme of immediate struggle for workers' power in South Africa, talking instead of a revolution by stages and seeing the 'present stage' as one in which the working class subordinates itself to middle class and other allies against apartheid.

Nothing is more urgent for the South African working class right now than to build a revolutionary working class party committed to fight for a working class revolution as the alternative to apartheid. But how can such a party emerge, how can the small number of already conscious Marxist revolutionaries build it? By way of recruiting ones and twos in debates with the ANC whose political leadership of the struggle is accepted "for now" — or by way of pointing out the necessary way forward for the existing mass workers' organisations, the trade unions, politically challenging the Stalinists and nationalists and building a revolutionary movement by way of that work? The implicit answer of Callinicos is that we advocate the former course. Nothing can be done with the workers' movement until the "political questions"



Photo: IDAF

are settled with the nationalist organisations like the ANC.

Anything other than what Socialist Worker calls "the primitive accumulation of cadres" is pointless and a diversion. The mass workers' movement must wait for the cadres to be "accumulated" before it can go on from trade unionism to politics.

This is where Socialist Worker misses the point. Socialist Organiser's call for the formation of a workers' party points to the vital next step in the development of the workers' movement in South Africa.

Only along that road can the existing workers' movement, with all its existing unevenness and contradictions, develop.

The level of struggle is such that the trade unions are being drawn into politics whether they like it or not. The question is — will they be sucked in behind the UDF and subordinated to its cross-class alliance or are the black workers to build their own independent political voice?

Inspiring

Learn from the experience of history, comrade Callinicos! Look at the inspiring growth of the Workers' Party of Brazil out of the unions. Or learn from the books of the Marxist movement — for example, from the call raised by the Marxists in the USA that the new, vigorous industrial unions created in the 1930s in great industrial battles should go on immediately to form their own working class party. However limited such a party would be at the beginning by the political immaturity of the workers it would mark a giant step towards independent working class politics. The job of the Marxists was to help push the movement forward according to its own necessary class logic and dynamic.

Engels

Or if Trotsky in the '30s doesn't impress you, remember

Frederick Engels back in the 1890s. When the Christian Socialist ILP of Keir Hardy got going in 1893 Engels argued that serious revolutionaries should abandon the sectarian Marxist party, the Social Democratic Federation and join the ILP. This was the real trade union-based workers' movement moving itself forward. The job of Marxists was to help them, to "go through the experiences" with them and thus help the mass working class movement develop towards independent revolutionary politics.

Defeatist

Callinicos can see dimly what the problem is. He talks of a basic identification with the ANC from the mass of the workers being coupled with distrust of the ANC from a large section of the best militants. But the solution he puts forward is not an answer for the class and the movement as a whole. It is the answer of a sectarian running away from the mass working class movement.

Callinicos is passively accepting utterly defeatist conclusions that for the decisive next period the broad independent workers' movement will be dominated by the ANC.

He is accepting that 'politics' is the sphere of the middle class nationalists and the CP class collaborationist allies, while a non-political trade union movement is all the working class can aspire to.

All that is possible for revolutionary socialists to build a tiny cadre organisation. In saying this, Socialist Worker are actually running in parallel to the ANC/CP who have denounced people like Joe Foster, general secretary of FOSATU, the largest union federation, for questioning the idea that the CP is the party of the working class.

There is a parallel between Socialist Workers' politics for South Africa and its politics for Britain — right down to the way

their politics — unintentionally — parallel the Labour Party right wing here.

Parallels

Socialist Worker says to the left in the Labour Party "go on, leave Labour, nothing can be done to remake the mass labour movement. We must start from scratch" and in doing this, Socialist Worker unwittingly parallels the arguments of the Labour Party right who say 'get out'.

On this hangs an interesting point. Supporters of Socialist Worker — indifferent alike to the recent lessons of Brazil and to the classic positions of the Marxist movement — have accused Socialist Organiser of trying to visit the sins of the British labour movement on the South African workers by way of advocating the creation of a

Labour Party there. But it is Socialist Worker who seek to transplant their own mini-scale "build-the-sect" schema into South Africa — where nothing is more urgent than the immediate development of working class politics rooted in the mass trade union movement — that the irrelevance and futility of these politics becomes self-evident and blatant.

Irrelevance

Think about this, comrades in Socialist Worker. It is not enough for Marxists simply to build up an organisation, recruiting one by one. Such a cadre organisation can be a wasteful irrelevance, a mere sect on the sidelines of history unless it arms itself with, and fights constantly for a revolutionary perspective for the whole mass working class movement — whether in Britain or South

Africa. The prime and irreparable job of revolutionaries is to gear up the mass movement for battle and in the course of the battles imposed on the mass movement win people to revolutionary politics not just in ones and twos but in hundreds and thousands.

Leadership

In South Africa the situation cries out for a workers' party to take the leadership of the struggle of the oppressed blacks. It cries out for a line of march for the black working class as a whole.

A revolutionary organisation that cannot map out a line of march for the class as a whole — that can show no way of challenging the existing nationalist and Stalinist leadership — such an organisation is not revolutionary at all.

The third issue of Socialist Organiser magazine — which is devoted to South Africa — has been given a name of its own: "Workers' Liberty". Why Workers' Liberty? The name sums up our politics and spells out what distinguishes Socialist Organiser politically.

Liberty? Liberty from economic exploitation by capitalism, but also from state tyranny. The word has an archaic ring to it today. One reason for this is that the idea itself has either been downgraded or entirely excised by large sections of the socialist movement as an aspiration of socialists. The Marxism of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky stands for a working class revolution which will destroy the state and immediately abolish it in anything like the bureaucratic form it assumes in class society, and immediately replace it by a state of a new type, actively controlled and administered by the majority — not a state in the old sense but a semi-state that will then wither and die as society evolves towards socialism.

This is encapsulated for Workers' Liberty in a quote from Lenin on page 3 of the magazine:

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

There will be at least one more issue of Workers' Liberty in 1985 and we hope to bring it out every two months beginning in January 1986.

Workers' Liberty

WORKERS' LIBERTY

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