SOUTH AFRICA

Black blood on British hands



Charles Longford

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1.

APARTHEID IN TURMOIL



South Africa is more than international news. It is a weak link in the chain that enslaves much of the world to the Western imperialist order. Month after month the world has watched the rise of resistance to the oppressive Pretoria regime. President PW Botha's declaration of a state of emergency in 36 of the country's

332 magisterial districts on 21 July showed the determination of the forces of reaction to thwart the yearning of the black masses for freedom.

Since September 1984 more than 6000 blacks have been killed and more than 2000 injured in the course of the growing resistance to apartheid. Despite the detention of thousands of trade union and community leaders the liberation struggle has gone from strength to strength. The spread of militant protest to Natal — an area not covered by the emergency provisions — confirms that the Botha regime can survive only through stepping up the scale and intensity of repression.

For the West, South Africa has become a major problem. As black consumer boycotts of white businesses gather momentum from the eastern Cape to Johannesburg to the mining areas of the Transvaal. Western concern has steadily mounted. Suddenly apartheid has become an international issue. One European country after another has withdrawn its ambassador from Pretoria. Even Britain, South Africa's closest friend, has signalled that some kind of a change is necessary. Leading Tories, such as foreign secretary Geoffrey Howe, have spoken out against the state of emergency and called for the release of Nelson Mandela, the imprisoned black nationalist leader.

In the USA moves to curb new investment in South Africa, ban the sale of computer technology to Pretoria and stop the sale of krugerrands in the USA have won widespread support in congress and in the senate. The US ambassador to South Africa has been withdrawn to Washington. In an unprecedented step Chase Manhattan Bank has stopped new loans to South African companies and banks. The First National Bank of Boston has stopped loans to the private sector and Citicorp, the biggest US bank, recently sold off all its loans to South African government agencies. Computer companies such as Apple have announced that they are ceasing supplies to South Africa.

President Reagan, although against the imposition of sanctions against South Africa, has urged the regime to 'reach out to its black majority by ending the forced removal of blacks from their communities and the detention of black leaders'. He has warned Botha to introduce changes in South Africa or face increased international condemnation and isolation. In France, socialist president Mitterrand has gone a step further. He has imposed a ban on new investment in South Africa and cut diplomatic ties with Pretoria. The Scandanavian Airline System, the joint

national airline of Sweden, Denmark and Norway, has announced its intention to stop all flights to South Africa.

It now seems as though every Western government wants to proclaim its hatred for apartheid in the strongest possible terms. This sudden conversion to the cause of freedom in South Africa may seem puzzling. Western countries, particularly Britain and the USA, have helped to make South Africa what it is today. Direct investments in South Africa worth more than £12 billion show how indifferent the West has been to the plight of the black masses. Wide ranging investment and trade relations testify to the intimate links between the apartheid regime and the West. This cosy and profitable partnership is now threatened by the combined impact of political resistance and economic crisis in South Africa. The fear that South Africa will explode has turned even a hardened reactionary like American secretary of state George Schultz into a critic of apartheid:

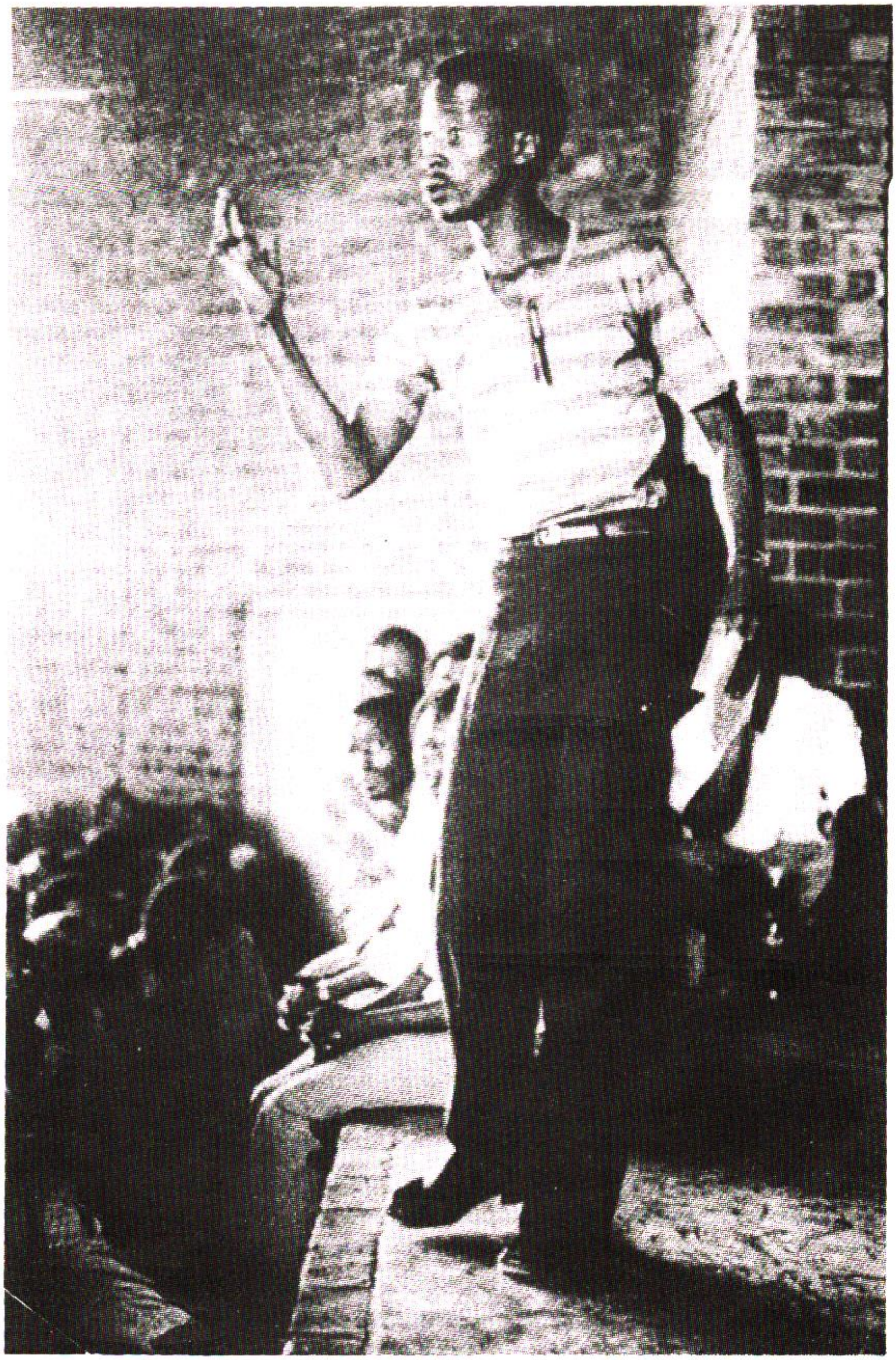
'Apartheid is an affront to everything we believe in. There isn't any argument for it, there's no justification for it, it's wrong. It's got to end. South Africa must get itself into the position where *all* its citizens can achieve citizenship, can achieve freedom, can achieve justice...Widespread violence...demonstrates the folly of oppression.' (*Financial Mail*, 2 August 1985)

This is the same Schultz who has no qualms about exporting US terror to Central America or the Middle East. His newly discovered scruples about apartheid can be understood if we look at the scale of the South African crisis.

Threat to profits

The South African economy is in deep recession. The 1984 counter-crisis measures failed to reverse the country's economic decline. In August 1984 the South African government responded to plummeting gold prices and the strong dollar by raising interest rates by three per cent to an unprecedented 25 per cent. Savage hire purchase restrictions were introduced to curb consumer spending and slow down the rate of inflation. Nevertheless, inflation runs at 17 per cent and corporate bankruptcies are mounting at more than 70 a month.

The August measures did not stop the fall in the rand, which hit



Black power in the factories: a car plant trade union meeting, 1985

an all-time low against the dollar in January 1985, sliding 47 per cent in a year. The July state of emergency hit the rand again and unemployment rose sharply. It is 68 per cent up on 1984 figures, running at an estimated 20 per cent among blacks. Rising inflation and strict government curbs on state spending, leading to a rise in the general sales tax on consumer goods of 14 per cent in 1985, have fuelled black anger and resistance.

Workers have responded to declining living standards in a wave of strikes. In November 1984, more than 900 000 workers took part in a general strike which paralysed the Johannesburg industrial belt for two days. In common with many recent strikes this stay-away raised a wide range of political demands as well as trade union issues. In July 1985, 3500 black workers at a Volkswagen plant struck over company plans to offer microbuses for the controversial New Zealand rugby tour of South Africa. In the mines, the black National Union of Mineworkers is threatening a national strike for a wage increase of 22 per cent, the recognition of Mayday as a national holiday and for an end to racist job reservation. Even before going on strike workers launched a boycott of white businesses around mining areas in protest at the state of emergency.

The recession in South Africa has even hit the privileged white minority. Unemployment has risen sharply, and the government has been forced to implement wage cuts among civil servants and public sector workers in an attempt to reduce state spending Feeding schemes for the children of unemployed white workers have sprung up in Johannesburg. White opposition to the Botha government has led to a rise in electoral support for the ultra-right Conservative Party led by Dr Andries Treurnicht. This hardline racist party split from the National Party over Botha's attempts to reform aspects of apartheid in 1982.

As the price of gold has dropped, so confidence in the economy has declined. Port Elizabeth, the Detroit of South Africa, is now mockingly referred to as the 'ghost on the coast' as large car manufacturers have cut back capacity by 50 per cent and laid off thousands of workers. In the first quarter of 1985, nearly R2.9 billion left South Africa — almost as much as in the whole of 1984. South Africa's finance minister Barend du Plessis said on a recent trip to Britain that he would be happy if South Africa achieved a predicted two per cent growth rate this year. This anticipation of continuing stagnation highlights the pessimistic outlook of South Africa's rulers.

It has become obvious that changes are going to be necessary if South African capitalism is to overcome its present plight. But the kind of changes necessary are not as obvious as the recognition that things cannot continue in the same old way. Both Western governments and South African businessmen want change. That some changes will take place in the apartheid system is now beyond doubt. The question is what kind of change will it be? Will it benefit the black masses? Or will it become a device for prolonging white supremacy and the oppression of the black masses? To answer this question, and appreciate what is really at stake in South Africa today, it is necessary to look at the apartheid system more closely.





(1) Change is inevitable!

(2) But will it benefit the Black masses? or reassert white supremacy & intensified exploitation

2.

THE SECRET OF SOUTH AFRICA'S SUCCESS



Johannesburg skyline: white prosperity built on black oppression

Many people believe that apartheid is a historical aberration incidental to the development of modern South Africa. If even George Schultz is against it then the persistence of the apartheid system seems to be the result of die-hard prejudices and an ingrained resistance to change. Indeed it is often argued that leading South African industrialists are themselves opposed to apartheid and that it would make good economic sense to get rid of the system altogether.

The view that apartheid is obsolete is confirmed by the fact that since the mid-seventies South African capitalists have tried to distance themselves from the more overt aspects of racial discrimination under the apartheid system. However, closer inspection shows that apartheid is not an irrational historical hangover but an indispensible feature of South African capitalism.

Apartheid and capitalism

A census published in March 1985 by the University of Pretoria provided a detailed breakdown of South Africa's population. Out of 31 million people there are five million whites, almost three million people designated 'coloured' (of mixed blood) and 876 000 Asians. Incidentally, the report notes that there are also 23 million blacks. Under the apartheid system South Africa's blacks are non-persons: they have very limited civil rights and even less property or economic resources. South Africa's five million whites enjoy the privileges of economic superiority and political power at the expense of the vast majority.

The all-pervasive discrimination experienced by the majority of South African people regulates the life of black people from the cradle to the grave. Many aspects of apartheid are petty while others affect basic matters such as the right to live and work in urban areas. Behind all the different manifestations of apartheid stands the mighty economic machine of South African capitalism. This machine absorbs cheap black labour, puts it through the wheels of industry, mining and agriculture and then expels it to distant reservations for the unemployed until the system requires more labour.

The apartheid system was established and perfected by the founders of modern South Africa in the post-war years — general Smuts, Hendrik Verwoed and John Vorster. It has been carefully

designed and modified to remove all obstacles in the way of the exploitation of black labour.

Apartheid condemns black workers to a permanent state of insecurity. Their lives are dominated by the changing requirements of a system of exploitation which controls where workers live, work and travel. The system restricts blacks' citizenship rights to remote and barren 'tribal homelands' which many blacks have never seen. By denying black people political rights the apartheid system legitimises the exploitation of 23 million non-persons on a scale that is the envy of the Western world. Apartheid is not the product of outdated Afrikaner prejudice, but a rational form of capitalist organisation for extending the boundaries of exploitation.

The impetus for the development of apartheid arose out of the conditions existing in South Africa when the National Party came to power in 1948. Up to the Second World War, South Africa was a colony of Britain. British influence restricted the development of the South African economy to its requirements for gold, diamonds, and other raw materials. This was good for Britain but it thwarted the ambitions of the emerging capitalist class in South Africa. The National Party government elected in 1948 was strongly influenced by the independent outlook of the Afrikaners, the descendants of the early Dutch settlers. It was committed to promoting the independent development of the South African economy under the direction of local entrepreneurs.

The South African capitalists set about creating the conditions in which a carefully controlled labour force could produce wealth on the scale needed to allow South Africa to compete on the world market. The National Party leaders inherited a host of racist institutions from the British administration. They took full advantage of the existing pattern of racial discrimination to streamline the economy and realise their capitalist ambitions. A high rate of exploitation had the added advantage of attracting much needed foreign capital.

The government subjected all aspects of the lives of black people to stringent regulation. Influx controls were extended by a new law in 1952 which made it necessary for every black over the age of 16 to carry a 'reference book'. Another law proclaimed that blacks had no right to live in urban areas. The tribally-based homelands — covering less than 13 per cent of South Africa's land in remote and barren areas — were now constituted as the only places where blacks were legally entitled to live and own land. 'Separate development' was enshrined in law.

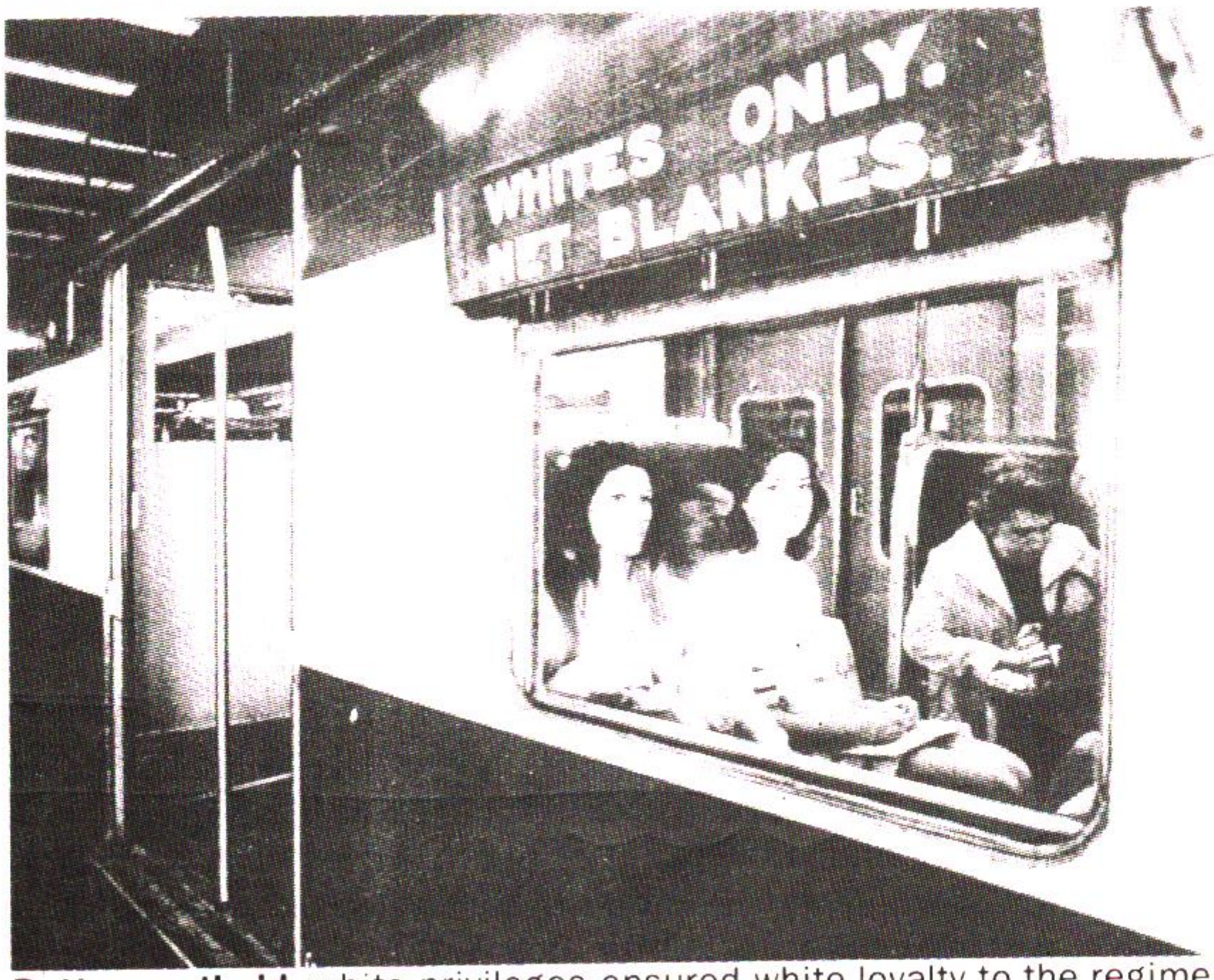
EVERY BLACK A MIGRANT. WORKER

of 1987 immigration laws (?)

'Separate development' reduced the lives of blacks to a totalitarian nightmare. The homelands transformed every black in South Africa into a migrant worker. The rigorous implementation of the pass laws together with notorious laws like the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act created a state of terror for black workers in the early years of apartheid. Migrant labour, based upon a more efficient and brutal implementation of the old British system of labour bureaux, ensured a steady flow of labour to the mines, factories and farms. Black workers were herded into compounds or hovels in the black townships and denied any say or control over their meagre existence.

STRIKES ILLEGAL

Further legislation dictated the terms of black exploitation in industry. In 1953, the government passed the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act. This declared all strikes by black workers illegal. It outlawed black representation at industrial councils or conciliation boards and the collection of trade union dues or contributions to sick benefit funds. In the words of the minister of labour at the time, this legislation was designed to 'bleed African trade unions to death' *(Working for Freedom,* K Luckhardt and Brenda Wall, 1981).



Petty apartheid: white privileges ensured white loyalty to the regime

Blacks had been excluded from the definition 'employee' and banned from joining trade unions by the Industrial Conciliation Act passed in the twenties. The new regime amended the act in the fifties to institutionalise job reservation. It gave the labour minister the power to reserve jobs for whites 'to safeguard the standard of living of the white worker of South Africa and to ensure that they will not be exploited by the lower standards of living of any other race'.

Discrimination could not be restricted to the workplace. To enforce apartheid rigorously in the urban areas the authorities were obliged to regulate all areas of contact between black and white South Africa. Hence the government introduced all the so-called 'petty apartheid' regulations — the restrictions on black access to restaurants, beaches, hotels, public transport and the regulations on racial inter-marriage. Petty apartheid also played an important role in forging an alliance between the South African regime and the white working class.

The apartheid system gave white workers important concessions and privileges, with the result that they were fully integrated into the racist system of domination. The extension of segregation from every workplace through every church to every neighbourhood, household and bedroom in the country guaranteed that every white regardless of class had a stake in the system. Job reservation and marriage restrictions enshrined the principle of racial superiority in law and strengthened the allegiance of white workers to the capitalist class.

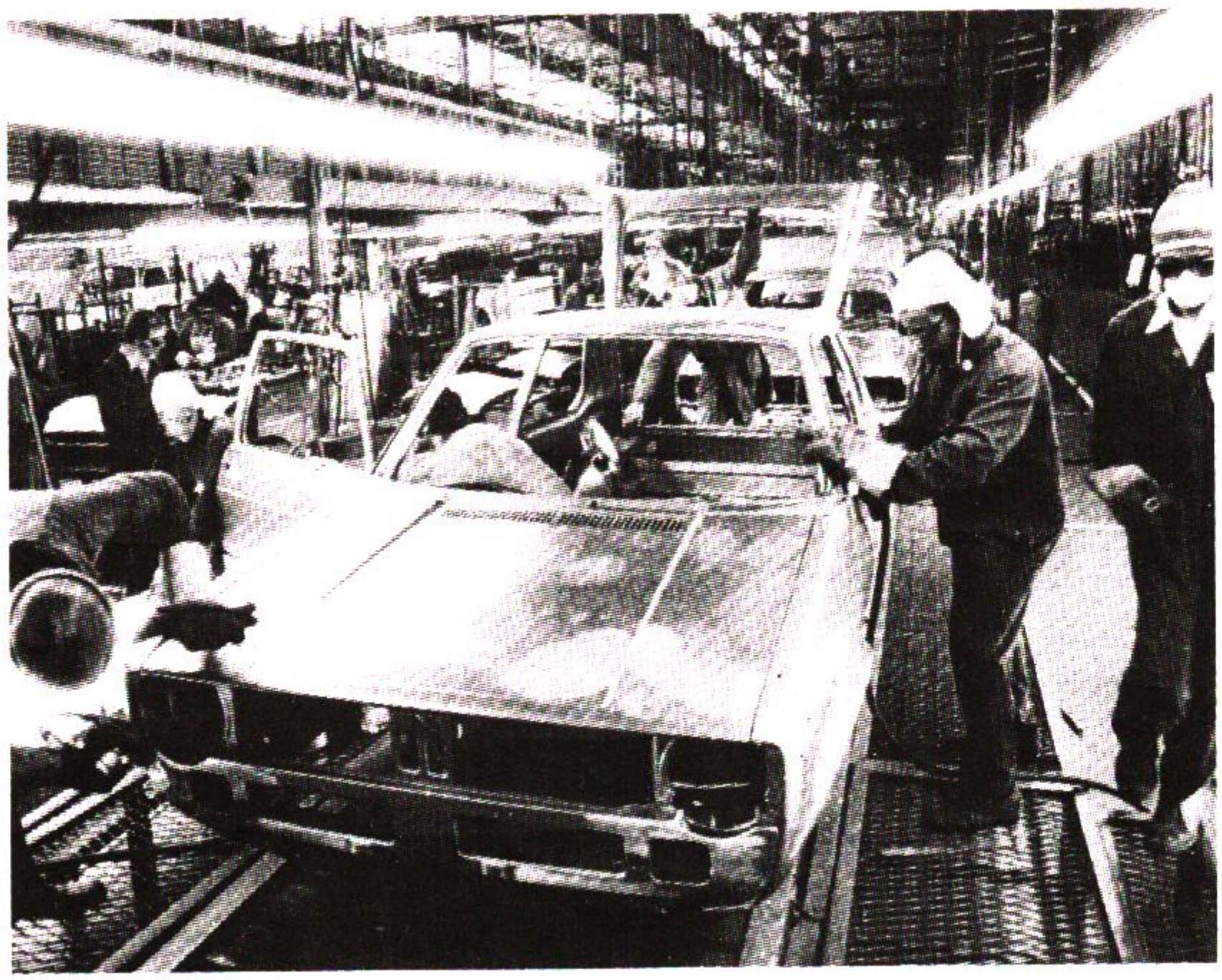
But apartheid is not merely a system of economic exploitation. It is a system which requires systematic coercion to guarantee its survival. Apartheid may provide super-profits, but it cannot avoid provoking the resistance of the black masses whose super-exploitation is the secret of the regime's high profitability. The constant threat of black resistance forces the regime into the constant deployment of its repressive apparatus. Repression and terror are thus an integral part of the apartheid system.

The profits of oppression

The oppression of the black masses created the conditions in which South African capitalism could take advantage of the global post-war expansion and grow at a phenomenal rate. The state provided

industry with cheap black labour and encouraged domestic manufacturing with a wide range of subsidies and import restrictions. In the 12 years up to 1960, real gross domestic product grew by 67 per cent. The constantly widening gap between white and black wages in this period reveals the extent of black exploitation. By the sixties, the average annual earnings of blacks in the mines stood at R168 compared to R2312 for whites. In manufacturing blacks received R345 compared to R1927 for whites. While South Africa boomed and the whites prospered as never before, black living standards stagnated.

South Africa became an investor's paradise — the rate of return on capital invested in this period stood at 19.9 per cent. In manufacturing profits averaged 24.6 per cent. Foreign capitalists invested in South Africa at the rate of some R150m a year eagerly taking advantage of the oppression of the black masses. Companies like the Leyland Motor Corporation (now BL), Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen were induced by the state to set up machining and engine assembly plants. As a result of this massive input into South Africa's manufacturing industry, South



Investor's paradise: super-exploitation yields super-profits at VW plant

Africa's real gross domestic product rose during the sixties by 76 per cent.

The repression of the black working class and the inflow of foreign capital transformed the economy. The rate of mechanisation rose rapidly. The structure of the South African economy began to resemble that of the advanced capitalist nations of the West. By 1969, the share of gross domestic product tied up in industrial holdings stood at 23 per cent — in West Germany it was 24 per cent, France 25 per cent and Italy only 20 per cent. **Apartheid was no obstacle to capitalist development. On the contrary, it was the very mechanism which promoted it.**

Meanwhile conditions for the blacks continued to stagnate. As agriculture was mechanised and became highly productive, black unemployment rose and the subsistence needs of the working class were cheapened. The homelands, which remained unproductive, strengthened the power of the state over black workers. They became prison camps where the surplus labouring population was contained, but was always on hand for industry. The more South African capitalism prospered the more it became an intolerable burden on the lives of the black masses.

The crisis of apartheid

The South African economic miracle could not last for ever. It could not escape from the recessionary trends that have ravaged the capitalist world since the seventies. Capitalists in South Africa too began to experience the effects of the worldwide fall in the rate of profit. The stagnation of the South African economy coincided with a growing awareness that the apartheid system could not continue indefinitely without provoking a major social explosion.

Leading capitalists whose wealth had been created through apartheid now objected that the system was too rigid and likely to cause problems in the future. The success of liberation struggles in other parts of Africa made many capitalists uneasy about their future prospects. It was this fear for the future that led Harry Openheimer, the head of the Anglo American Corporation, to argue for some measures of reform in 1976:

'Those of us who believe that private enterprise is the system best calculated to widen the areas of individual choice — to open up new

opportunities and raise the standard of life — have to show clearly that this private enterprise system is not something which bears the label 'for whites only'. In South Africa, we need, for our security and for our development, a real unity in the country to resist events such as we have seen taking place in Angola, but it is surely intensely illogical to ask a lot of black people to stand together with whites in order to oppose Communist aggression, if, at the same time, by law and customs, they are excluded from most of the benefits which are conferred by the free enterprise system.' (Fifth stock exchange chairman's lecture, London, 1976)



Liberalising apartheid: capitalist Oppenheimer meets Zulu chief Buthelezi

Oppenheimer was not that far ahead of his time. The emergence of black resistance during the past decade has convinced many of his colleagues at home and abroad that reform is necessary. The apartheid system which has provided vast profits for the capitalist class has also created the instrument of its own destruction — the South African working class. The recognition of the growing threat from the working class has made many bosses keen to reform apartheid. In January 1985 South Africa's top five business federations proposed the sort of reforms that are now endorsed by many of the country's frightened capitalists. They recommended that Botha introduce full citizenship for all blacks in the country, end the removal of blacks from white areas and restrict state intervention in trade union affairs.

Western investors anxious to guarantee their profits also want to see things change. Professor Richard Hall, a top American economic adviser, summed up how South Africa's status has changed in the eyes of foreign investors:

'In December 1984 South Africa ranked with some of the "safest" of the world economies for exporting, finance and investment. The situation is now perceived somewhat differently and South Africa's rating has dropped to a par with some of the higher risk Third World countries. The world disinvestment movement is illustrative of this. The embarrassment of staying in South Africa, on moral grounds is being compounded by reduced future profitability.' *(Financial Mail,* 14 July 1985)

Western investors' demands for change do not arise out of any concern with the plight of the black majority. They have come out in favour of reforms because they see no other alternative to defending their investments.

The pressure from Western governments for change may cause the Botha regime some embarrassment but it provides no solution for the black majority. Their ideal would be capitalism without apartheid. But since capitalism in South Africa cannot survive without apartheid, Western opinion is prepared to accept some gesture of goodwill. The strategy of reforms cannot work for the simple reason that reforms cannot abolish South Africa's special relations of exploitation. If the South African capitalist class attempted to exploit workers along respectable Western lines without the benefit of apartheid, the whole system would soon collapse.

Many genuine opponents of apartheid believe that racial oppression could be eliminated without the overthrow of the whole system. This prejudice leads people to put their faith in Western pressure on the Botha regime. But the oppression of the black masses cannot be separated from capitalist exploitation in South Africa, nor can it be reformed. It is not possible to negotiate over whether South Africa's blacks will continue to be oppressed by the Pretoria government and its Western allies. It is only possible to discuss the terms on which oppression is meted out. Apartheid can only be ended when the black masses overthrow their oppressors. Reform in South Africa can only mean the establishment of a new framework of oppression.

If we turn to look at the development of the class struggle in South Africa we can see why the quest for reform is nothing but a trap for the black masses.

3.

THE ENEMY WITHIN



Today's upheaval in South Africa is the culmination of decades of struggle. Resistance against apartheid has gone through three distinct phases — each representing a greater challenge to the system.

Mass defiance and state terror: 1950-1960

Mass struggles against apartheid broke out from the earliest days of the new system. Nationalist organisations, notably the African National Congress and later the Pan Africanist Congress, led mass movements of civil disobedience. The protest movement pursued the course of non-violent action and attempted to realise its objectives through legal channels.

The state responded with naked force. When 8500 blacks volunteered to be arrested in defiance of the pass laws in 1953, government authorities stepped in and crushed the campaign. Some struggles, such as the Alexandra bus boycott in 1957, were successful. For three months 50 000 workers from the township on the outskirts of Johannesburg, boycotted the local bus services over a fare increase. After constant threats, intimidation and police terror, they forced the government to introduce legislation requiring employers to subsidise transport costs. But there were few black successes against the ruthless forces of white supremacy.

The state's response to continuing passive defiance of apartheid legislation was to unleash the wave of terror which culminated in the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. The police opened fire on an unarmed crowd and killed 67 people. The South African capitalist class made it clear that they would not make any concessions to meet the democratic aspirations of the black majority.

In response to the wave of revolt after Sharpeville the government outlawed the ANC and the PAC and imprisoned black nationalist leaders, including Nelson Mandela. The authorities stepped up policing and tightened the implementation of the pass laws. The use of systematic terror succeeded in containing this wave of black revolt. South African capitalism took off in the sixties on the backs of the defeated black masses. But it was only a matter of time before a new generation of blacks would take up the struggle. When it did the experience of state terror forced the liberation movement to go beyond the non-violent protests that had been simply smashed off the streets by the apartheid regime.

73-79

The emergence of the black working class: 1973-1979

In January 1973, 2000 workers in a brick works in Durban went on strike for higher wages. Strikers took to the streets and demonstrated about their miserably low wages. They won an increase and sparked off a wave of strikes in the area which signalled the emergence of the black working class as the most significant factor in the South African class struggle.

The strike spread like a veld fire. The Frame group in Natal,

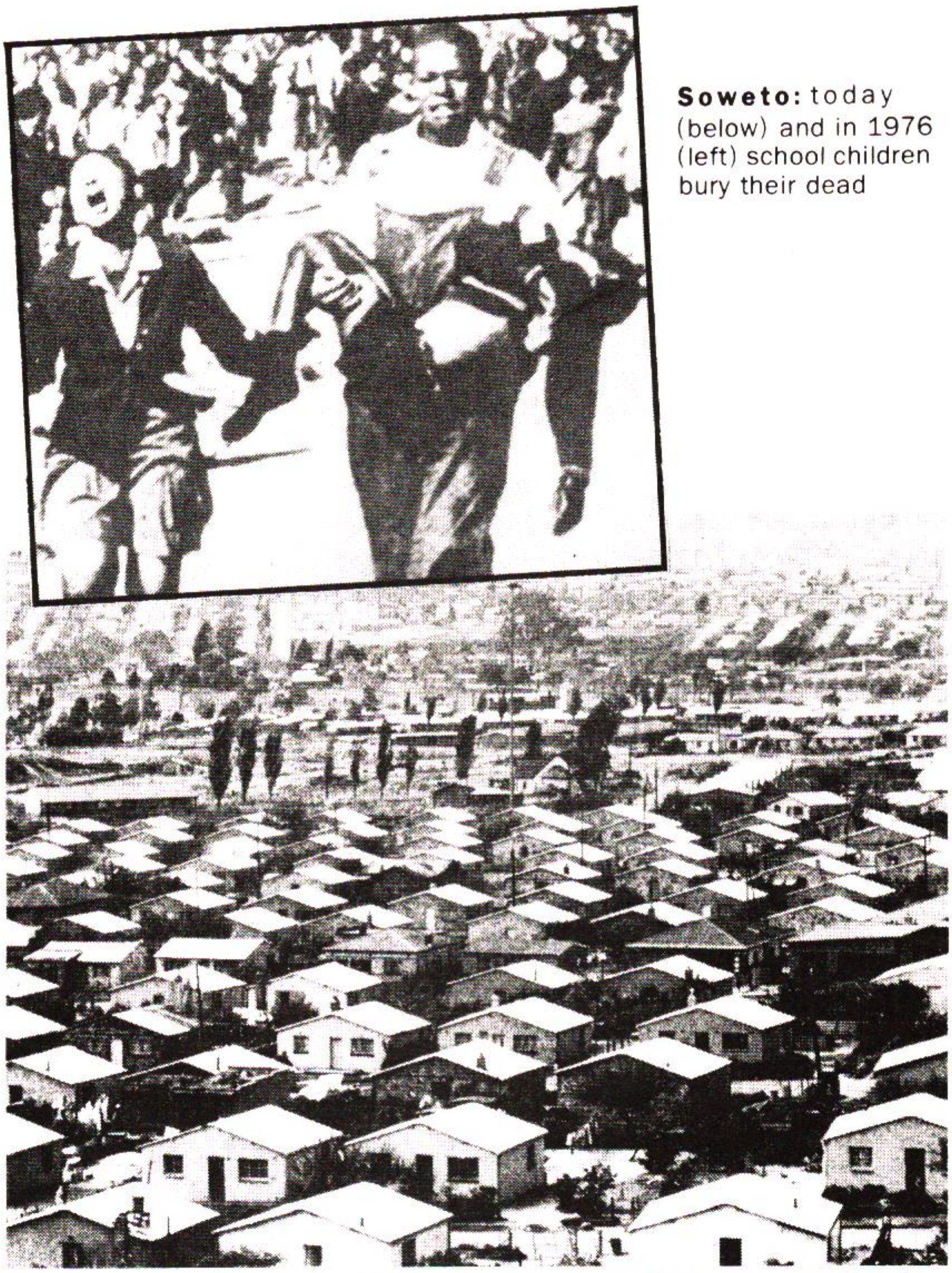
South Africa's largest textile employer and notorious for low wages and poor conditions, was quickly engulfed. By the end of January, 6000 workers were on strike and workers won a modest increase. But the strikes continued. As one factory won a wage increase and returned to work, another group down the road came out. By the end of 1973, more than 100 000 workers had been on strike in Durban.

The Durban strikes revealed the new strength of blacks within the capitalist economy. The growth of the black working class was spectacular. By the end of the seventies, black workers numbered in the region of five million — the largest working class on the African continent. Despite the constant threat of police terror, the success of the Durban strikes changed the balance of forces in South Africa. For the first time, black workers had taken on the employers and the police, and won. Black workers no longer felt like helpless victims forced to bow to the 'baas'. The new confidence gained through collective action kindled the spirit of resistance throughout South Africa.

The liberation of Mozambique in 1974 and South Africa's abortive military intervention against the revolution in Angola in 1975 contributed to the new mood of defiance in the black ghettos. The new confidence was expressed most forcibly through the black consciousness movement. At first this movement was confined to students, but it spread rapidly through young people in the townships. The culmination of this process of radicalisation was the Soweto uprisings in 1976.

The immediate focus of the uprising was the 'Bantu' education system. Rising student numbers in chronically under-funded schools resulted in serious overcrowding and deteriorating conditions. Young blacks rebelled against a system which was used to contain them and train them for careers as casual labourers. The breaking point came with an official decree that the Afrikaans language should be the medium of instruction for half the subjects taught in all African secondary schools. When students of Soweto responded with a peaceful demonstration on 16 June 1976, they were met with a hail of bullets. This provoked further demonstrations and boycotts which spread throughout the country and brought the Bantu education system to a halt for months.

The state and the employers could compromise with the demands of black workers for higher wages. But the system could not deal with the challenge from Soweto which threatened the very



Soweto: today (below) and in 1976 (left) school children bury their dead

foundations of apartheid. By 1976 South Africa was experiencing the first stages of the world recession. The state responded in traditional style: black students and workers who supported calls for stay-aways were gunned down in the streets. Hundreds were detained, beaten and intimidated.

Soweto 1976 marked a significant advance on Sharpeville 1960. As the anti-colonial struggle in southern Africa added Zimbabwe

to Angola and Mozambique on the list of independent African countries, the new mass movement in South Africa adopted a militant anti-imperialist outlook. The state's response forced many young blacks to flee South Africa — to join the national liberation movements in exile, with the intention of returning as armed guerrillas. Others joined the rapidly expanding black trade union movement.

In the late seventies there was still some life left in the apartheid economy. As South Africa entered the eighties a rise in the price of gold on the world market gave the economy a boost. But the turbulence of the previous decade had shown the ruling class that it had to do more than simply respond to black demands with rhino whips, tear-gas and bullets. Some concessions had to be made. As much as it went against the grain, the South African bosses began to realise that they had to live with the black workers whose labour provided them with their profits. By the end of the decade the state had legalised black trade unions. The black working class had served notice on the South African establishment that its days were numbered.

The township revolt: 1979-1985

In the five years since trade unions were legalised, membership has risen from 40 000 to more than 500 000. More than 30 independent trade unions have emerged, the majority organised into two federations. It is estimated that around 25 per cent of the black workforce is now unionised. As black unions have grown, so have strikes and other forms of industrial action. In 1984 South Africa had more strikes involving more workers and costing more man-days than in any other year in its history.

The bosses' attempts to 'liberalise' industrial relations and contain workplace unrest by recognising trade unions have backfired. Instead the unions have increasingly provided a channel for expressing black political aspirations. The most important development since 1979 has been the spread of working class struggles from the factory floor to the townships. In the early eighties trade union struggles, particularly in the eastern and western Cape, began to take the form of strikes linked to

community consumer boycotts. As the recession began to bite, employers clamped down on unions and militants. Workers responded to lockouts and mass dismissals with community-based campaigns against local white businesses.

1983 BUS BOYCOTT

The East London bus boycott in July 1983 is one example of the widening scope of workers' struggles. A dispute over a fare increase turned into a political struggle not only against the South African state but also against the puppet regime in the neighbouring Ciskei homeland. The majority of East London blacks live in the Mdantsane dormitory township 20km from East London within the Ciskei homeland. Despite being highly unionised they earn by far the lowest wages in South Africa. Transport is a struggle involving two to three hours every day for nearly 25 000 workers. The workers are processed through a single checkpoint twice a day and squeezed into more than 200 dirty old buses. The bus company is jointly owned by the Ciskei government and the South African state. It is widely believed that chief Lennox Sebe, Ciskei's stooge president, is a director.

An 11 per cent rise in bus fares was the last straw. The South African Allied Workers' Union had been campaigning for better facilities and lower fares for students and old people for three years previously. The announcement of the fare increase prompted a united response from the community. Thousands of workers were prepared either to defy the company and walk to work, or to go out of their way and catch the trains. The trains became the organising centres of the boycott — especially after Sebe introduced a state of emergency and banned all meetings. 'As long as the train is running up and down, that is our meeting place,' was the workers response.

Sebe unleashed his 'green berets' — his government-sponsored vigilantes — on the black workers. They raped, beat and shot many workers and shop stewards in an attempt to break the boycott. He then turned the Ciskei police on the workers. At the end of July Sebe's police shot five people at Jackson station, and on 2 August they killed a 16-year old school boy. Police and soldiers formed an armed blockade at the Mount Ruth and Edgeton stations to prevent workers from catching the trains. They opened fire on the workers, leaving 15 dead and 35 seriously wounded. By the end of August more than 1000 languished in Sebe's jails without hope of a trial. In early September the union was banned. However, the bosses' terror tactics only hardened workers' resolve. They also transformed the struggle into a direct challenge to the Ciskei

government.

The growing violence in Ciskei alarmed the South African government. It responded by despatching first the commissioner of police and then the head of the security police closely followed by foreign secretary Pik Botha to press Sebe to make concessions. Two days later the bus fares were halved. But the workers were not impressed: 'five cents won't bring back the dead' was their response. The boycott continued. No amount of concessions, even the offer of free rides, would induce workers to return to the buses. Such dramatic events have become commonplace in South Africa in recent years. While the focus of anger in this case was the Ciskei government, in black ghettos the focus for popular discontent became the township councillors.

After the Soweto uprisings in 1976, the government introduced community councils. In 1983 the government introduced new legislation to give greater autonomy to black local councils as a prelude to drawing them into a new regional 'multi-racial' second tier of government. Elections to these bodies took place in November 1983. Between 75 and 85 per cent of blacks boycotted the polls. Within a year they had become the target of mass resistance.

The town councils were given a limited autonomy but no viable economic means of administering black urban areas. Faced with a deepening recession and the need to curb state spending, the government reduced its contribution to town council budgets. As a result, most councils found themselves in debt. The Soweto council, for example, had a deficit budget of R30m which it attempted to reduce to R10m by increasing rents and service charges, in many cases by 100 per cent. Rent increases like these on the east Rand last August sparked off the outburst of black anger against these stooge institutions and their participants.

The results have been displayed on the television screens of the world. There have been a series of violent outbursts against 'system' blacks, collaborators with the apartheid system. By August 1985 only five out of 32 councils were still functioning. Black councillors and policemen who managed to escape the panga knives and petrol bombs were living in specially built fortresses on the outskirts of black townships with a 24-hour police guard. They are now referred to locally as 'the government in exile'.

In the eighties the class struggle in South Africa has raged with an unprecedented ferocity. It has spread beyond the major urban



Popular retribution: the grisly fate of collaborators with apartheid

and industrial areas. There have been riots and attacks on collaborators in more than 40 townships, some in backwaters like the Orange Free State. New place-names have joined the list of sites of the bloody atrocities committed by the apartheid regime: Duduza, Sebokeng and Mdantsana.

The state responded to the black revolt in the townships with a new tactic – army occupations. Last October 7000 police and army personnel invaded the trouble-torn Vaal townships of Sharpeville and Boipatong. They had already been to Sebokeng, where they searched 250 000 blacks and daubed them with fluorescent red paint, and arrested 354. This operation sparked off a stay-away protest in the Transvaal in which nearly a million workers and students brought the Witwatersrand to a virtual standstill.

For the first time the strike brought trade unions, student and community organisations into joint and co-ordinated action. The demands of the two-day strike included:

- the withdrawal of the army and police from the townships
- the resignation of community councillors
- no rent and bus fare increases
- the release of detainees and political prisoners
- the reinstatement of all dismissed workers
- the withdrawal of the general sales tax and other taxes
- democratically-elected student representative councils at black schools, the abolition of educational age restrictions, and an end to sexual harassment at schools.

A significant factor in the success of the strike was the fact that migrant workers living in hostels throughout the Vaal triangle came out and supported the strike. In Soweto in 1976 the police had successfully used migrant workers against striking students.

Although the state's response to the stay-away was cautious at first, the townships erupted against the police. At least 23 people were killed. Many private employers also approached the strike warily, avoiding taking disciplinary action. However, state sector bosses took a harder line. The state-controlled Sasol oil complex sacked between 5000 and 6000 workers at their Secunda plants. A huge police operation oversaw the mass deportation of workers from the hostels to their various homelands.

Private employers gained confidence from the state's tough response. In May 1985 the mineowners followed the example of the public sector and sacked 16 000 gold miners when negotiations over black wages for skilled jobs broke down. Black workers

refused to work at unskilled rates in jobs previously preserved for whites. It was significant that one of the major companies refusing wage rises and summarily sacking its entire black workforce was the Anglo American Corporation. Under its boss Harry Oppenheimer, Anglo American has long been a leading exponent of reform within the apartheid system. There could be no better demonstration of the limited scope for reform in South Africa.

The growth of the trade union movement and the extension of workers' struggles into the townships has challenged the apartheid system on a scale never witnessed in South African history. The state of emergency expresses the fact that the ruling class has little room to manoeuvre today. Yet Botha has not been slow to respond to the long-term threat of black resistance. His programme of reforms is part of a comprehensive strategy which has evolved directly in response to the rising tide of black unrest.

4.

PLAYING FOR TIME



President PW Botha: hoping that reform will save apartheid

Ever since the serious dangers facing the apartheid regime became apparent in the mid-seventies, the South African government has been playing for time. In consultation with its Western allies, the Pretoria regime has evolved a strategy which combines selective reforms with more intense repression. The aim of this strategy is to pre-empt revolution by creating a layer of blacks loyal to the system to act as a buffer between the masses and the regime. Let's look at how this strategy has evolved.

The reform of apartheid

The South African ruling class has always tried to enforce its oppressive rule in such a way as to minimise social instability. Over the past 20 years there have been important changes in the National Party's approach to the problem of maintaining order under apartheid. Back in 1968 prime minister John Vorster had no inhibitions about telling the world his view on the role of black workers:

'We need them, because they work for us...but the fact that they work for us can never — if one accepts this as one's own criterion one will be signing one's own death sentence now — entitle them to claim political rights. Not now, nor in the future. It makes no difference whether they are here with any degree of permanency or not.' *(Divide and rule*, Barbara Rogers, IDAF, 1980)

The emergence of an urban black working class has transformed the balance of forces in South Africa. Today's rulers of apartheid have had to eat the words of their predecessors. In his keynote address to the Natal National Party conference in August 1985, president PW Botha conceded that blacks were here to stay in the cities. He proposed granting blacks full citizenship rights and accepted the inevitability of black representation in political institutions.

The pressure to reform apartheid has slowly gathered momentum over the past decade. Employers began to recognise trade union rights and the government moved gingerly to dismantle the more provocative aspects of apartheid. Municipalities began abolishing segregation in parks, libraries and other public areas. In 1974 the government allowed black visitors

from overseas to make use of designated hotels on the same basis as whites. In 1975, in a gesture to world opinion which served only to draw attention to the extent of petty apartheid, the luxurious Nico Malan opera house in Cape Town was opened to all races. These measures did nothing to placate South African blacks who were more concerned about real democratic rights than about going to the opera. The reforms succeeded only in stimulating further black demands and in deepening the sense of insecurity among whites.

The Soweto uprisings and the growth of black trade unions forced the ruling class to take the question of reform more seriously. Businessmen began to get together in pressure groups to lobby the government to move faster. Leading industrialists from both the English-speaking and the Afrikaans communities, such as Harry Oppenheimer of Anglo American and Anton Rupert of the Rembrandt empire, launched the Urban Foundation at a conference in March 1977 to push for reforms.

The foundation's objective was to encourage the development of a black middle class with 'Western-type materialistic needs and ambitions'. The white businessmen reckoned that 'only by having this most responsible section of the urban black population on our side can the whites of South Africa be assured of containing on a long-term basis the irresponsible economic and political ambitions of those blacks who are influenced against their own real interests from within and without our borders' *(The struggle for South Africa*, R Davies, D O'Meara, Sipho Dlamini, Zed Books, 1984).

The Urban Foundation went beyond simply awarding prizes to outstanding black businessmen. It initiated and financed projects aimed at improving the quality of life of blacks in the townships. It poured money into black housing and set up training schemes, literacy work and other types of pre-school and adult education. The aim was to upgrade black education to provide industry with desperately needed skilled manpower. White businessmen embarked with crusading zeal on a drive to educate young blacks in the virtues of capitalism. The Free Market Foundation, another newly formed body, tried to train blacks in the spirit of free enterprise. Supported by various English and Afrikaans employers' associations and by the white trade union bureaucracy, it declared 1 July to be an annual 'free enterprise day'.

The other main concern of the white business pressure groups was the issue of leasehold rights for blacks in the townships. They lobbied the government to grant 99-year leases as a key step in

creating a stable black middle class in the volatile urban areas. The businessmen received strong support from South Africa's military commanders. Major-general Charles Lloyd agreed that it was necessary to 'secure through administrative and socio-economic action' the support of sections of the black community. He recommended cultivating a middle layer of blacks by 'alleviating friction points, grievances and dissatisfaction, improving their standard of living, giving them something to defend in the revolutionary war'.

The conciliatory approach recommended by the businessmen made sense to National Party leaders. The arrival of PW Botha in the prime minister's office in 1978 meant that the reform strategy was fully backed at the highest level in the land. As Botha announced his 'total strategy' he launched a host of official inquiries to make detailed recommendations on how apartheid could be reformed.

Total strategy

Botha presented his 'total strategy' as a means of protecting 'free enterprise' in South Africa from the 'Marxist threat' and 'total onslaught' from inside and outside the republic. He put forward a set of policies which sought to reconstruct the basis for stable capitalist rule in South Africa. Botha's policies aimed at defusing mass resistance by incorporating sections of the black population in a new 'historical bloc', a bloc however with clearly defined limits.

Two of Botha's inquiries, the Wiehahn investigation into industrial relations and the Riekert commission on the pass laws, received worldwide acclaim. The Wiehahn commission proposed to reduce industrial conflict by institutionalising the emerging black trade unions. The report noted the fact that 'there were simply not enough skilled workers to fill all vacancies'. It recommended that 'increasing numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, particularly blacks...had to be trained and utilized to perform higher-level skilled jobs'.

The commission recommended the registration of the existing black unions and established a set of complex conciliation and arbitration procedures. It repealed all job reservation laws and regulations (except those applying in the mining industry),

prohibited racially exclusive closed shops and allowed blacks to be indentured as apprentices under certain conditions.

A National Party pamphlet distributed during the Randfontein by-election in June 1979 explained the government's rationale for introducing these reforms in the sphere of industrial relations:

'The Wiehahn Report is to the advantage of all South Africa *because:*

● the creation of more skilled job opportunities increases the growth rate

● an increased growth rate gives South Africa an economic power base in the military struggle for survival

● labour unrest will be restricted to the minimum

● the abolition of statutory work reservation will stimulate the influx of foreign capital

● the position of the white worker among others will be protected more efficiently

● 27 black trade unions *which exist already* and have a membership of some 70 000 are now being effectively brought under the discipline and control of the law

● it includes a ban on political activities; control over their membership; access to their constitutions; access to their financial statements and balance sheets; control over their funds by a state inspector.'

***(Facelift Apartheid,* Judy Seidman, IDAF, 1980)**

The Botha regime recognised the fact that South African capitalism now depended on black labour and set about trying to contain the working class through a network of legal controls and procedures.

The Riekert commission attempted to draw clear lines between blacks who were settled in the cities and migrant labour. It aimed to create a framework within which a settled black middle class and skilled working class could develop. In fact this exercise amounted to little more than a streamlining of the old system of influx control:

'Every black person in South Africa, wherever he may find himself, is a member of his specific nation....

'The Bantu in the white area, whether they were born here or whether they were allowed to come here under our control laws, are here for the labour they are being allowed to perform....

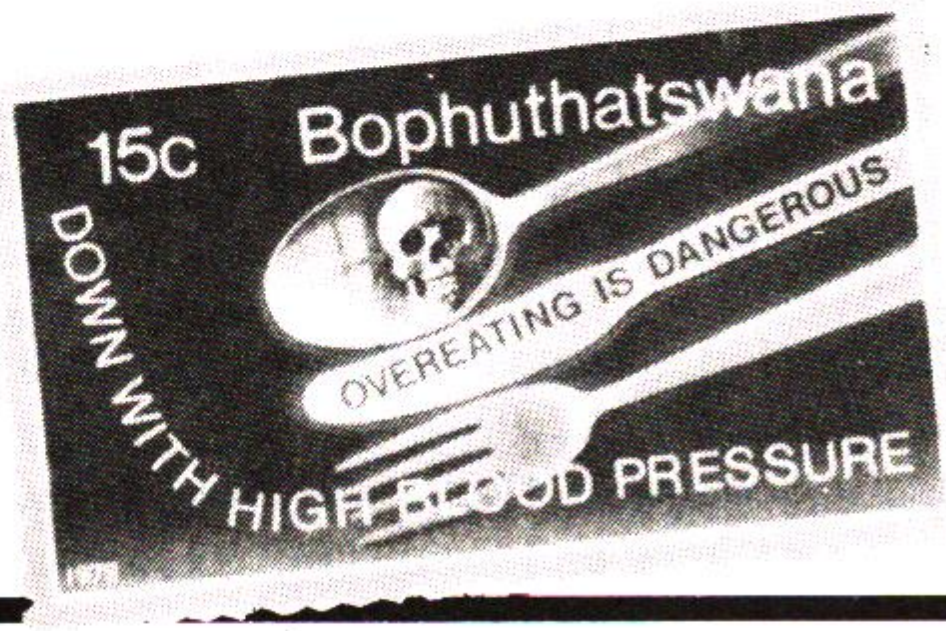
'Fundamental citizenship rights may only be enjoyed by a Bantu person within his own ethnic homeland....

'The maximum number of people must be present in their own homeland.'

The commission divided blacks in urban areas into migrants and those designated as 'section 10' blacks. These were black people who could claim to have lived in a particular township since birth, or to have worked continuously for one employer in the area for a minimum of ten years, or for more than one employer for a minimum of 15 years. It recommended that 'section 10' blacks be allowed to leasehold their property on 99-year tenures. Blacks who did not qualify were denied any right to be in the cities. The aim was to give urban blacks a stake in the system by giving them a superior status to blacks living in the homelands.

Botha's government also began to talk of introducing a new constitution which would include coloureds and Indians in a three-tier parliament. The government openly presented this measure as a device for broadening the base of support for the regime. It aimed to strengthen the government's control over society and to deepen ethnic divisions among South Africa's population. To round off this new 'alliance for capitalism', the government pressed ahead with its policy of 'homeland consolidation'.

In 1970 all blacks were classified as citizens of their designated homeland. Until 1976 a form of dual citizenship persisted under which many blacks also remained citizens of South Africa. However when the homelands pursued the separate development programme to its final stage and became formally independent, this arrangement came to an end. The October 1976 declaration of independence by the Transkei meant that all blacks with 'Xhosa' stamped in their passbooks lost their South African citizenship overnight. The same thing happened to 'Tswanas' when



A homeland stamp: worse than a sick joke

Bophuthatswana became independent in December 1977, and for 'Vendas' when Venda gained its independence in 1979. Blacks were powerless to prevent the government from further depriving them of citizenship rights in this way.

A new law in 1978 codified the systematic exclusion of black people from South African citizenship. Dr Connie Mulder, the Bantu administration minister, explained the objective of the legislation:

'If our policy is taken to its logical conclusions as far as the black people are concerned, there will not be one black man with South African citizenship.' *(Divide and rule*, Barbara Rogers)

Pressing ahead with the process of declaring the homelands independent states was a key element in Botha's 'total strategy'. The regime persisted in this scheme even though the new states were widely regarded as a sham both in South Africa and abroad. When the impoverished Bophuthatswana issued its first national stamp bearing the slogan 'overeating is dangerous' and the flagpole snapped at Ciskei's independence ceremony, many were ready to dismiss the whole project as a very sick joke. Gambling joints and strip clubs proliferated outside the strict censorship of Pretoria in almost every one of the new state 'capitals'. This led some to dub Botha's grandiosely titled 'constellation of southern African states' the 'constellation of casinos'. Yet the consummation of the separate development strategy in the independent homelands played a vital role for the apartheid regime. The very existence of the independent homelands ratified the denial of political rights to the black masses throughout South Africa.

Total coercion

All the discussion about reform disguised the extension of the coercive powers of the apartheid state. While the government granted notional trade union rights, in 1974 it tightened up its riot control legislation. A new law allowed the authorities to ban any assembly, including trade union meetings. It made attendance at an illegal gathering a criminal offence and police officers were no longer required to warn that force would be used if people failed to disperse. Another new act gave the president powers to ban any

organisation and confiscate its funds if he objected to its politics or international connections. This was a grave threat to the emerging trade unions, some of which were affiliated to international federations.

The state also had the power to ban any publication which it considered undesirable. While the Pretoria censors and their friends avidly studied pornography from every corner of the globe, the state prevented the circulation of left-wing material. The most draconian piece of legislation was the 1976 Internal Security Amendment Act, which superseded the Suppression of Communism Act. The new law was heralded as a democratic gesture — now anybody could be arrested, detained for indefinite periods, denied access to lawyers and have the pleasure of solitary confinement and torture. A new Terrorism Act gave the state absolute powers of arrest and detention.



Botha's riot police: the other face of reform

After the Soweto riots the state clamped down on black organisations and militants. In October 1977 a total of 17 black consciousness movement organisations were banned. Steve Biko, a leading black consciousness activist, was murdered in detention. Biko was one of 14 deaths in state custody as detainees 'slipped on bars of soap in showers', 'hung themselves in cells without any fixtures' or committed suicide by 'throwing themselves' off police station rooves. Between June 1977 and June 1978 a total of 21 217 people were tried for crimes against the state, including public violence, unlawful and riotous assembly, sabotage, inciting or promoting unrest, arson and malicious damage to property. Of these 14 390 were convicted (SAIRR Survey 1978).

The police targeted blacks in the townships. In April 1978 the government launched a wave of 'crime prevention blitzes'. Police and army units with guns and fixed bayonets cordoned off townships like Soweto and Alexandra in a systematic campaign of terror against blacks. Jimmy Kruger, the minister of justice, admitted in parliament that nearly 4000 people had been arrested during these operations — the majority for offences under the pass laws. By the end of 1978, more than 250 000 blacks had been arrested for pass offences. As unemployment began to rise, so the state's offensive against urban blacks intensified.

In January 1979 the government pushed the 'Idle Bantu Bill' through parliament. This law amended the definition of 'idle' which previously referred to 'normally unemployed' blacks. Now any black 'not lawfully employed...for a period or periods in the aggregate of not less than 122 days during the preceding 12 months' was now deemed 'idle' and subject to immediate removal to the homelands.

While the state was pursuing its homeland independence policy it was dumping unemployed blacks from the cities into these areas. The state also began to crack down on the squatter camps which had mushroomed on the outskirts of many cities as blacks tried to escape starvation and poverty in the homelands. Shanty towns like Modderdam near Cape Town and Crossroads in the Cape became symbols not only of black resistance, but of state coercion. By the end of the seventies, hundreds of thousands of blacks had been uprooted or made homeless. Botha's reform strategy was simply storing up trouble for the future. By the early eighties the South African ruling class discovered that very few blacks had been won over to identify with 'free enterprise' or with Botha's reforming administration.

Total failure

The government never conceived of reforms as an alternative to apartheid. In fact the process of reforms has unfolded alongside the continuing oppression of the black masses. Botha's most conspicuous failure is that he has not created a section of middle class blacks who can mediate between the state and the masses. The real significance of black resistance in the eighties has been the fact that the black challenge has emerged directly in defiance of the regime's attempts to create such mediators. The growth of the black trade union movement reveals this rejection of the strategy of collaboration.

Workers in struggle have spontaneously gone beyond the limits set by the state on trade union activites. The growth of the mineworkers' union is one example. When the union was first set up in the late seventies, the employers recognised the union, provided offices for union officials and agreed to allow them access to the mines. Yet the employers' attempts to clamp down on militancy in recent years have led to open conflict between the union and management. The result has been that a union organisation originally fostered by management has become an increasingly popular and uncontrollable force. Miners' leader Cyril Ramaphosa explained early in 1985 how the employers' aggressive approach had helped union recruitment:

'One of the reasons why workers started joining our union in large numbers is the resistance they saw from management....

'If management had not resisted the union, if they made everything easy workers would have been suspicious....

'As soon as I was arrested they said this is the union we want to join.'

***(South African labour bulletin,* January 1985)**

Ramaphosa's recognition that state or employer approval of trade unions or trade union leaders means the kiss of death as far as rank and file workers are concerned highlights the failure of Botha's industrial strategy.

As black workers have been forced to take on their employers in conditions of deepening recession, so they have gone beyond the limits laid down by the bosses and their state. In many instances

where unions have become compromised with management or government, workers have simply joined or formed other unions. The existence of more than 30 independent black trade unions in South Africa reflects the way the movement has developed in the face of the establishment's attempts to tame the black working class. There is little scope for Western-style trade unionism under apartheid. Workers have few illusions in arbitration procedures set up by a state which has turned out the riot police on strikers on 329 occasions in the first six months of 1985. After ten years of reforms 95 per cent of strikes are still illegal and after every major strike workers count their dead and wounded, and their comrades detained in prison camps, deported to the homelands or dragged before the courts.

The black response to the state's attempts to create a black middle class in the townships has been equally uncompromising. When the Riekert commission's recommendations became law, black resistance intensified. Botha's new constitutional changes brought things to a head. In formal terms the new constitution gave coloureds and Indians the same status as whites. In reality their much vaunted 'share of power' gives them only partial jurisdiction over their own 'community affairs'. The low interest in the elections to the new assembly reflected the lack of enthusiasm for the scheme. Only 60 per cent of eligible coloured voters registered and only 32 per cent actually voted. While more Indians registered, only 20 per cent bothered to vote.

The spectacle of assembly members being elected with no more than 118 votes only underlined the isolation of self-appointed black representatives. The claims of Allan Hendrickse, whose coloured Labour Party took 76 of the 80 coloured seats, that he intended to 'fight apartheid from the inside' fooled nobody. While Botha welcomed the outcome of the elections, he commented that coloured and Indian leaders still had to 'groom their people for the use of their democratic rights' *(Africa,* October 1984). In fact, the majority of coloureds and Indians had excercised their limited democratic rights by refusing to vote. Botha's announcement before the elections that he would implement the new constitution regardless of the outcome, only served to galvanise opposition to the scheme into action. Hostility to the regime began to spill over into unrest throughout South Africa. Civil rights organisations, like the United Democratic Front which coordinated the boycott of the elections, linked up with student organisations and trade unions to condemn apartheid's sham democracy. Botha's

elections merely served to highlight the fact that the black majority had no democratic rights.

As violence mounted in the townships, Botha was forced to make concessions. In his January 1985 address to the opening session of the new parliament, the president announced some significant changes. Blacks who qualified for leasehold property rights in the townships would now be allowed to obtain freehold titles. For the first time the regime ratified the permanent residence of blacks in urban areas. While he still pursued the strategy of dividing urban and migrant blacks, this recognition was highly significant. Botha also promised to set up an informal forum through which black representatives would be invited to discuss further constitutional changes.

Further bloodshed forced more concessions. In April, Botha announced that it was no longer necessary for blacks to lose their South African citizenship when a tribal homeland became independent. Botha moved further to dismantle the regulations of petty apartheid. He abolished all restrictions on 'mixed' marriages and sexual relations across the colour line. These changes again only intensified black resentments and the fears among whites that Botha was betraying them.

Botha faces serious difficulties with the whites. The recession has hit white jobs and living standards and the government has been forced to break its election promises and cut public spending on welfare and other benefits. The result has been mounting tensions in the Nationalist ranks. In 1982 Dr Andries Treurnicht formed a right-wing split from the National Party in response to Botha's constitutional plans. By-elections and opinion polls show that his newly formed Conservative Party is gaining growing support among disgruntled whites. An important consideration in Botha's decision to impose a state of emergency in July 1985 was his concern to regain white support by displaying a hard line against the blacks.

The state of emergency confirms the narrowing options of the Pretoria regime. It leads to the inescapable conclusion that apartheid cannot be reformed out of existence. The repudiation of the government's stooges in the townships and the homelands by the black masses poses an immediate problem for Botha. All the black representatives he has tried to cultivate have been discredited in their own communities.

The smouldering ruins of collaborators' houses throughout South Africa today reveal the difficulty facing the government's

project of creating a layer of black mediators. Botha's 'total strategy' has provoked a backlash which has further alienated potential black middle class collaborators from his regime. Botha's local councils have come to symbolise for middle class blacks the reality that there is no space for them in the political life of modern South Africa. They have been left to face the wrath of their own people.

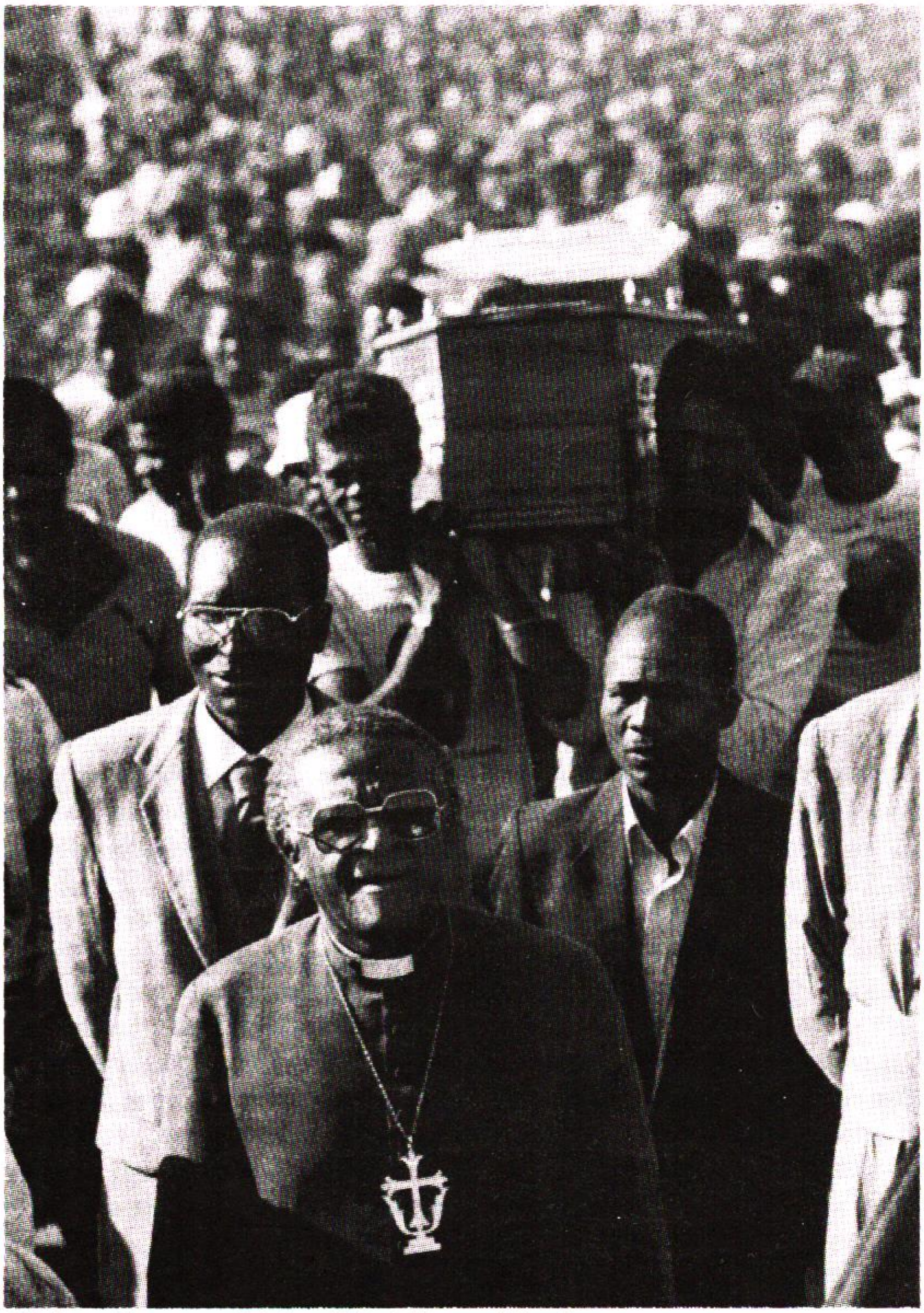
The eleventh hour

South Africa can no longer be ruled in the old way and all attempts to construct a new system of domination have failed. The state of emergency gives Botha a breathing space in which to pursue his attempts to devise a more lasting solution through establishing a dialogue with 'responsible' black leaders. Yet the problem remains — who can Botha negotiate with?

The international press favours church leaders such as bishop Desmond Tutu and Alan Boesak. But Tutu and Boesak are clerical figures with no mandate from any section of blacks. They have come to play a prominent role in the current struggles because there are no other credible black leaders. Black nationalist organisations have been banned and their leaders imprisoned or forced to go into exile or to go underground. Since the state of emergency many leaders of the United Democratic Front have been detained and others forced to go into hiding.

The only prominent figures still around in the black communities are clerics. The only assemblies that are tolerated are church services, though the regime has stepped in to restrict funerals to indoor services to prevent them turning into mass demonstrations. Events have thrust the bishops into the forefront of the struggle. But their moderate and pious posturing means that their influence in the turbulent and highly politicised atmosphere of the townships is limited.

Tutu's calls for negotiations and for an end to township violence have already lost him much support. In July 1985 Tutu threatened to leave South Africa if the violence continued. A meeting of students in Soweto produced an angry response: 'Let him go, then we can get on with the revolution without him restraining us'. Tutu may be highly respected in London and Washington, but his standing among South Africa's blacks is more uncertain. Dr



Bishop Desmond Tutu: filling the political vacuum

Beyers Naude, a dissident white cleric and a close colleague of Tutu's, recently explained how the bishop's status depends on his backing abroad:

'Each time the international community takes action against South Africa it causes Desmond's credibility to rise. That gives him money in the bank again.' *(Sunday Times*, 4 August 1985)

Experienced Western politicians recognise that Tutu is not the man for the job they want to see carried out in South Africa. They understand that if Botha is going to get anywhere he must negotiate with somebody who carries real weight in the black community. This is why senior government figures in London and Washington have called for the release of the jailed African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela. Western diplomats and the media are pressing Botha to free Mandela as a prelude to negotiations with him and the ANC. The consensus in support of this approach now includes both British and American foreign secretaries, as well as opposition political leaders in the West and heads of state throughout black Africa.

Zambia's president Kenneth Kaunda, one of Africa's elder statesmen, has openly called for Mandela's release in the context of a compromise settlement between blacks and the apartheid regime:

'The reason why I am insisting on the release of Mandela is that then there will be someone responsible, someone who is likely to carry by far the greatest majority of African opinion. If he could be released now, the African people will say: "Ah, Mandela is going to speak. Let's wait." It will be a psychological thing. It's the surest way of buying a little time....

'You've got to have a beginning to stem this black anger in the African masses....Both Mr Botha and myself need a strong Mandela.' *(Financial Mail*, 19 July 1985)

Kaunda is more forthright than his Western colleagues. But every Western politician calling for Mandela's release shares Kaunda's hopes that the nationalist leader who has become a symbol of black resistance to apartheid could play a useful role in helping the regime to contain the township revolt. Even the Johannesburg *Financial Mail*, the journal of South African big business, has called for Mandela's release. An editorial entitled 'Tomorrow's

Moses' in August 1985 only questioned cynically whether he still had 'the influence and charisma to deflect, literally at the wave of a hand, the black nationalist mood from war to peace'.

The chorus of calls for Mandela's release from establishment spokesmen in South Africa and the West is an insult not only to Mandela, but to the black masses of South Africa. The fact is that Botha has little to offer in negotiations. His desperate attempts to salvage the apartheid system were summed up in the repeated warning in his August speech to the Natal National Party conference: 'Don't push us too far'. Botha's state of emergency shows what lies in store for any black who is prepared to take on the system. Violence has always been the ultimate enforcer of white rule. In fact, violence is more necessary today than at any other stage in South Africa's history.

The preoccupation of the South African regime and its Western backers with negotiations and the quest to find credible black leaders exposes the fragile foundations of white domination. It shows that the racist regime now understands that it cannot protect its way of life indefinitely through terror alone. Its only hope of survival now lies in splitting the black masses through wheeling and dealing with puppet black politicians. The courage and maturity of the mass movement indicates that the black working class will not allow such manoeuvres to hold back or divert its fight for freedom.

5.

SANCTIONS AND SOLIDARITY



In parliaments and party conferences, trade union meetings and gatherings of left wingers and anti-apartheid activists throughout the West, all discussion about South Africa is framed by the debate about sanctions. Despite the good intentions of many of the participants in these discussions the whole debate implies that Western governments and big companies can act as a force for change in South Africa. The sanctions debate gives the initiative to the establishment forces in the West and focuses on how their progressive mission can be fulfilled. There are broadly three options under discussion.

● Constructive engagement

It is now difficult to find a leading politician in London or Washington who still subscribes to the old-fashioned view that economic development itself will lead to social progress in South Africa. Yet the official position of both the British and American governments is support for a policy of promoting reforms through codes of practice laid down for Western companies operating in South Africa since the late seventies.

British firms are guided by an EEC code which forbids workplace discrimination, insists on equal pay for equal work and on trade union recognition. Most US firms in South Africa subscribe to the similar code of six principles drawn up by black preacher Leon Sullivan, who is also a director of the car giant General Motors. These codes also demand that Western companies devote considerable resources to community projects.

Since 1983 Western codes of practice have been extended to include a requirement that Western companies should challenge apartheid restrictions on labour mobility. This policy of 'super-engagement' has been promoted by church leaders like Desmond Tutu in South Africa and his clerical colleagues in the West. It goes hand-in-hand with the increased diplomatic efforts of Western politicians to promote negotiations between the regime and representatives of the black community.

The aim of engagement is to use the leverage of Western businessmen to remove some of the rigidities of the apartheid system and to encourage the South African authorities to adopt a more conciliatory approach towards the black majority.

● Selective sanctions

The steady increase in violent conflict in the townships has led many Western observers to the conclusion that 'constructive engagement' is not working. Pressure for selective sanctions to push the Pretoria regime into introducing more substantial reforms more quickly has gathered momentum in the West. In July Mitterrand's socialist government in France announced an immediate ban on all new French investments in South Africa, the recall of the French ambassador from Pretoria and the introduction of a resolution condemning South Africa in the United Nations security council.

The French resolution to the United Nations called for voluntary sanctions against South Africa including a ban on the import of krugerrands, a suspension of loan guarantees and a ban on nuclear contracts and the sale of information technology.

Despite US and British opposition, the resolution was carried.

More significantly, the US congress has voted in favour of a similar package of sanctions. These include support for a ban on new bank loans to the South African government or state corporations and a ban on new investment by US firms. They also demand a stop to the sale of computers or new technology products and a ban on the sale of krugerrands. This resolution was backed not only by Democrats but by many members of Reagan's Republican Party.

In Germany chancellor Kohl has come under strong pressure to take action along similar lines, not only from the opposition Social Democrats, but from supporters of his coalition government. In Britain the Labour Party and the Liberal-SDP Alliance have called for the imposition of tougher measures against the South African government.

● Disinvestment

More radical campaigners against the apartheid regime in many Western countries have called for more drastic sanctions still to isolate South Africa and force Botha to make substantial concessions. They have called for an end to investment and loans to South Africa, an end to the purchase of South African gold and other minerals, an end to collaboration in the military and nuclear fields, and for an embargo on oil and other essential supplies such as electronic and communications equipment, engineering products and chemicals.

In certain American states and provincial cities anti-apartheid campaigners have succeeded in implementing elements of this policy in relation to municipal investments. Radical Labour councils have pursued similar policies under 'apartheid free zone' projects in Britain. Such initiatives have been pursued alongside demonstrations and protests outside South African embassies in most Western capitals. The debate around sanctions focuses on discussions of the best mechanism for pushing the South African regime towards reforming the apartheid system.

Arguments rage in newspapers and journals of the right, left and centre about the possible consequences of different measures on the economy and people of South Africa, black and white, as well as their likely impact back home. The whole discussion presupposes that Western governments and big companies can play a progressive role in South Africa. But can they? History and logic suggest otherwise.

A sanction-buster's paradise

It is now almost a quarter of a century since the United Nations first adopted a resolution if favour of sanctions against South Africa. International pressure for sanctions has come to the fore in response to periodic eruptions of conflict in South Africa. The first wave of demands for sanctions followed the massacre at Sharpeville in 1960 and the upsurge of resistance that followed. In November 1962 the general assembly voted in favour of voluntary economic sanctions against the apartheid regime. In 1963 the security council imposed a voluntary embargo on the supply of arms to South Africa.

Again in the seventies the Soweto riots stimulated new calls for sanctions. These led in 1977 to the most stringent United Nations measures yet — a mandatory embargo on military supplies to South Africa. The current pressure for sanctions has gathered momentum through the steady build-up of resistance to the regime in South Africa since 1979.

The "take-off" of the South African economy in the sixties, a development which depended heavily on foreign capital investment and overseas trade, confirms that the 1962 and 1963 voluntary sanctions did little damage to South African business. The consolidation of the homeland policy and the influx control system in these years shows that sanctions had no progressive influence on the apartheid system. But what about the 1977 arms embargo? This resolution had the full backing of the major powers involved in supplying arms to South Africa, notably Britain and the USA. Let's look at the effect of the arms sanctions more closely.

On 4 November 1977 the United Nations security council adopted resolution 418 establishing an embargo on arms to South Africa which was binding on all states. It established a special committee to ensure the compliance of the member states with the resolution that:

'All states shall cease forthwith any provision to South Africa of arms and related material of all types, including the sale or transfer of weapons or ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, para-military police equipment, and spare parts for the aforementioned,

and shall cease as well the provision of all types of equipment and supplies, and grants of licensing arrangements, for the manufacture or maintenance of the aforementioned.'

The security council further called on 'all states to review, having regard to the objectives of this resolution, all existing contractual arrangements with and licenses granted to South Africa relating to the manufacture and maintenance of arms, ammunition of all types and military equipment and vehicles, with a view to terminating them'. It further decided that 'all member states shall refrain from any cooperation with South Africa in the manufacture and development of nuclear weapons'. Most UN member states, including Britain and the USA, formally notified the secretary general of their intention to comply with its terms. What has been the effect of the arms embargo?

A trial in Birmingham crown court in July 1985 exposed one way the South African authorities have been able to get around the embargo. Five Midlands businessmen were convicted on charges of conspiracy to evade the ban on exporting military equipment to South Africa. The trial revealed a complex network of companies in different countries that provided a supply route for high-tech military equipment for the South African armed forces. Over a seven-year period the British arms entrepreneurs supplied their South African contacts with parts for gun sights, magnetrons used in radar, lead sulphide infra-red detectors used in heat seeking missiles, tools for making detonators and aircraft parts. Some of the illicit aircraft parts were forwarded under the cover that they were destined for the South African mining industry. But a number were returned with the complaint that 'they were failing at 40 000 feet'.

Four South Africans were arrested with the British businessmen but were released on sureties of £400 000 put up by the South African embassy. They shortly jumped bail and turned up at a press conference in Pretoria appearing as celebrated undercover agents of Armscor, South Africa's state arms company. They boasted that they had saved their government at least £2.5m. Britain has no extradition treaty with its close ally South Africa.

The British arms dealers got off lightly for their role in this international terrorist conspiracy. Three received fines and sentences of up to 15 months and the fourth got off with a fine. A similar case in 1982 involved 31 shipments of machine gun components and FN rifles, each worth more than £1m. These were



Shooting up the townships: South African security forces demonstrating British export products to black school children



exported without licenses labelled as 'hydraulic equipment', raising suspicions of complicity by British customs' authorities.

Clandestine operations involving the smuggling of military goods through devious international connections have played an important role in supplying South Africa with components it cannot easily produce at home. Products from Britain, the USA and Germany — all eager for this highly profitable under the counter trade — find their way to South Africa via Israel and other Middle Eastern countries. But such criminal conspiracies are just one of the ways that South Africa has succeeded in beating the embargo.

The arms embargo excludes so-called 'dual purpose' equipment, products which have both military and civilian use. A recent report by the British Anti-Apartheid Movement *How Britain arms apartheid* gives detailed examples of how the British government has continued to grant export licenses for a range of equipment including aircraft, radar systems and computers, claiming that these are for exclusively civilian use. 'In some cases', the report charges, 'items are effectively reclassified as "dual purpose" in order to permit their export to South Africa.' For example, the British government has insisted that the Plessey AR3D computer controlled radar system, which is designed for military use, has 'a genuine civil application' to justify its export.

The electronics firm Marconi, now part of GEC, was granted an export license for a radar system which was previously designated for exclusively military use. The official line was that these systems were 'intended for use in air traffic control'. In fact they now help to guarantee South Africa's air superiority over the subcontinent.

The activities of British subsidiaries in South Africa provide another means of getting around the arms embargo. Here are some of the products supplied to the South African armed forces by British firms operating in South Africa:

- landrovers and trucks: BL
- ammunition and explosives: ICI
- artillery shells: Trafalgar House/Cementation
- computers: ICL
- communications equipment: GEC/Marconi, Ferranti
- aircraft franchises: Lonrho
- oil and petrol: BP and Shell

The main effect of arms sanctions on South Africa has been to encourage the development of the country's own armaments industry. Since the Western squeeze began South Africa has become a major arms manufacturer in its own right, particularly in the tactical weapons field. The armaments development production corporation — Armscor — is South Africa's third largest corporation and the country is now a net exporter of arms.

Over the last two decades South Africa's self-sufficiency in arms has mushroomed from 40 per cent to 85 per cent. A recent South African survey claims 95 per cent self-sufficiency, but this underestimates the continuing foreign contribution to South Africa's military might. According to the Anti-Apartheid report out of a total arms procurement budget of some R1.62 billion in 1984, more than R900m was spent on arms purchases from overseas via private sector companies.

The Anti-Apartheid report concludes that the British government has failed to implement 'both the letter and the spirit' of the UN arms embargo. And Britain is not alone in its sanctions busting. A report prepared by the American Friends Service Committee and the Washington Office on Africa in 1984 claimed that the USA 'is sabotaging the international arms embargo by winking at US companies' exports to Africa'. The report noted the familiar techniques: 'Rather than outright sales of large weapon systems, exports...consist to a great extent of the building blocks of modern weaponry — components, unfinished sub-assemblies that can be easily submerged in large-scale transactions'.

State department officials in Washington claim that they have received the same assurances as their British colleagues that all this military hardware is not going to be used for military purposes. French and German companies involved in the development of South Africa's nuclear industry have continued to assist South Africa's nuclear weapons programme. They argue that the arms embargo does not rule out all forms of nuclear collaboration.

What has been the impact of the partial oil embargo imposed by some Opec countries? According to a survey in the *Economist* in March 1985, South Africa has circumvented sanctions by purchases on the world spot market and by oil-from-coal import substitution. The result is that South Africa is now 80 per cent self-sufficient in oil and has 10 years reserves safely tanked away down disused gold mines.

In almost 25 years of campaigns for sanctions against South Africa the only sphere in which they have been successfully

imposed is sport. The sport boycott has not been imposed as a result of diplomatic pressure or mass campaigning in the West. The decisive factor in making sporting sanctions bite was the threat by Third World countries to pull out of international meetings that included South Africa and fixtures with countries that retained sporting ties with the apartheid state. The key agreement was drawn up at the Gleneagles hotel in Scotland during a weekend break in the Commonwealth heads of state meeting in London in June 1977. African and Third World leaders had threatened to withdraw from the 1980 Commonwealth Games unless Britain and other countries cut off sporting links with South Africa.

Unlike economic or military sanctions, a ban on sport with South Africa costs the West nothing. Yet a black boycott would destroy the Olympics and every other international sporting gathering. Hence the Western powers have been happy to endorse this anti-apartheid gesture. It has not stopped British, Australian or New Zealand cricketers and rugby players from maintaining contacts with their white friends in South Africa. And in Britain's case a little passport paperwork has given the nation in Zola Budd one of its best woman athletes for years.

The West's golden goose

The failure of the Western powers to impose any significant sanctions against South Africa reflects the close economic and political links between the regime and the West. John McQuiggan of the United Kingdom South Africa Trade Association sums up the extent of the ties between South Africa and Britain:

'It is Britain's twelfth largest export market, represents between seven per cent and 10 per cent of total overseas investment, and some 400 groups on the London stock exchange have one or more South African subsidiaries.' *(Financial Times,* 2 August)

'Britain', he concludes, 'has more at stake than any of our European partners or the US.'

British companies play a major role in strategic areas of the South African economy, in addition to the military sector.

● Banking and insurance

Of the total assets of South Africa's top 20 banks in 1982-84 more than 60 per cent belonged primarily to foreign-owned banks of which the two biggest were Barclays and Standard Chartered. The two banking groups Barclays National and Stanbic are the two largest banks in South Africa. British banks such as Hill Samuel, Hambros and Guinness Mahon have taken advantage of the squeeze on lending by US banks to up their loans to South Africa over the past year. Insurance companies like Legal and General, Prudential, Commercial Union and Norwich Union are all as familiar names in South Africa as they are in Britain.

● Mining and oil

The London-based Consolidated Goldfields owns more than 40 per cent of Gold Fields of South Africa, which produces about 25 per cent of South Africa's gold. Rio Tinto Zinc manages the Palabora copper mine and the Rossing uranium operation in Namibia. Tiny Rowlands' Lonrho giant controls Western platinum and BP and Shell between them account for 10 per cent of South Africa's coal exports. The ICI subsidiary AECI is closely involved in South Africa's oil-from-coal industry. Casrol and Perkins Diesel are engaged in specialised oil products and diesel engines.

● Engineering and manufacturing

Major British firms with household names such as BL, GEC, GKN, Lucas, Vickers, Smiths Industries, Tube Investments, Metal Box, Blue Circle, British Oxygen, Chloride, Dunlop (now part of the BTR conglomerate) all have a substantial stake in South Africa.

According to Uksata the market value of UK investment in South Africa is around £5 billion. Put together with substantial indirect investment, mainly through portfolio holdings, the total comes to more than £11 billion. This sum represents between 40 and 45 per cent of total foreign investment in South Africa. Britain's total income from South Africa in 1982 was around £3.5 billion. Trading ties between Britain and South Africa run through every sector of the economy. The British Overseas Trade Board supported 84 trade missions to South Africa between 1977 and 1982. Britain's surplus on its South African trade was £479m in 1984, a 40 per cent increase on the previous year.

Britain has long been the Western country with the closest ties to the apartheid regime. But its competitors are fast catching up.

There are now around 320 US companies with subsidiaries in South Africa, including virtually all the big oil, motor, and pharmaceutical companies. In 1983 US direct investments amounted to $2.2 billion, 20 per cent of the total. The USA is strongest in the growth sectors of the South African economy — oil (44 per cent), cars (33 per cent) and computers (70 per cent). West Germany also has a growing stake in South Africa, followed by France and Switzerland — and Japan is moving in.

The close economic ties between South Africa and the West are paralleled by close political ties. These are obviously closest with Britain, the traditional colonial power in the region. After the British defeat of the Boers, the original Dutch settlers in South Africa, at the turn of the century, Britain became the dominant power. The 1910 Act of Union consolidated South Africa's subordinate position within the British empire. After the Second World War the apartheid system was developed in South Africa by successive National Party governments within the British Commonwealth. It was not until 1961 when a wave of revulsion swept black Africa in response to the Sharpeville massacre that South Africa was pushed out of the Commonwealth.

Britain retained close connections with the white supremacist regime. Through the sixties Britain and the USA shielded South Africa from calls for tougher sanctions at the United Nations. The UN increasingly reflected the hostility of Third World countries towards the apartheid regime. The major powers in the Western alliance cultivated South Africa as a proxy for Western interests in the region. South Africa's Simonstown naval base became an important outpost in the West's global military plans. In the mid-seventies the old colonial regimes of southern Africa fell one by one to liberation movements — Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe. South Africa came to play an increasingly important strategic role in Western plans for keeping the region safe for capitalist investment.

Between Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence in Rhodesia in 1965 and the start of the war of liberation in the early seventies the Western powers staked their plans on maintaining Smith's white regime in power. South Africa played the leading role in making sure that the token sanctions imposed by the United Nations failed to work. Thanks to supplies from BP and Shell re-routed through South Africa and Mozambique, Rhodesia's oil consumption actually doubled despite sanctions. However once the guerrilla war destabilised the country it became obvious in

London, Washington and Pretoria that they would have to deal with a black Zimbabwe. South Africa for the first time began to impose real sanctions to force Smith to come to terms with the new situation.

Since Zimbabwe's independence South Africa has used its economic and military might to ensure that Robert Mugabe's regime accepts the realities of imperialist domination in southern Africa. Economic and military sabotage directed against Zimbabwe by South Africa aimed to prevent any extension of the black liberation struggle towards South Africa. The emergence of the South African defence force in the late seventies corresponded to Western requirements for a subcontinental policeman.

The excesses of South African militarism against its neighbours have sometimes embarrassed its Western allies. But they have helped to equip this strike force to enforce imperialist interests in the region. It is widely if discreetly approved in ruling class circles in the West.

Sanctions don't make sense

Given the close economic and political ties between the ruling classes of the West and the apartheid regime, it would be illogical to expect Western governments or businessmen to take any action to undermine the South African system. British and American capitalists invest in South Africa because it offers a high rate of profit.

In March 1985 the *Economist* reported a 1983 survey which showed that the rate of return on investment in mining in South Africa was 25 per cent, compared with 14 per cent in the rest of the world. In manufacturing South Africa offered 18 per cent compared with 13 per cent elsewhere. Even though these high levels of profit have dropped sharply in the subsequent recession, South Africa remains a favourable investment outlet compared with the recession stricken industrial belts of the USA and Europe.

Why are profits so high in South Africa? Because, according to the *Economist*, 'there is a plentiful supply of cheap labour and usually effective law and order enforcement'. In other words, because of the apartheid system. The super-exploitation and the

mass degradation of South Africa's black population makes it a haven for Western investors. Far from being hostile to apartheid, the Western capitalist powers are its oldest sponsors and its greatest beneficiaries.

Yet there are flaws in this capitalist paradise. The apartheid system itself generates problems for the capitalists who derive such vast profits at the expense of the black working class. The problems arise from the operation of the apartheid system inside South Africa and from reactions to apartheid abroad.

There are conflicts between the requirements of an advanced capitalist economy and the apartheid system. A modern economy needs a flexible and mobile pool of skilled workers. In a country where there is a shortage of white skilled labour, an expanding economy relies on drawing in black workers. But the system of separate development demands that blacks live, and as far as possible work, apart from whites. Apartheid relies on excluding blacks from certain areas, certain jobs, and from anything higher than an elementary education. Social mobility — in terms of education, occupation, and housing — is a key feature of an advanced capitalist society. But it is anathema to apartheid.

An even bigger internal problem resulting from apartheid is that its oppressive character inevitably provokes resentment and revolt. This necessitates a vast network of soldiers, policemen, spies, informers, prison camps and all the other expensive paraphernalia of a modern police state. This in turn provokes more resistance, requiring still more repression, in the familiar spiral of the past five years. The rigidities of the labour market resulting from apartheid regulations and the instability resulting from revolt against the system have produced a new consensus in South Africa that some modification of the system is required.

The apartheid regime has long been a considerable embarrassment to the Western governments and companies which are closely associated with it. Establishment politicians in the West constantly uphold the virtues of democracy and tolerance and racial equality and justice. Yet they cannot disguise their links with a regime which excludes the vast majority of its population from any say in government. The authorities of the same state are seen regularly on television brutally terrorising their own people, often including school children. And the rulers of this intimate ally of the West and bastion of the free world proclaim its commitment to the virulently racist ideology of white supremacy.

Links with South Africa are a particular embarrassment for

Western powers which have important economic and diplomatic relations with black African countries. Black African governments have to respond to popular pressure from their own peoples who acutely resent the last outpost of white supremacy on their continent. Because of their extensive economic stake in Africa, both Britain and France have to take special account of black African hostility to South Africa. The USA which is extending its involvement in both west and east Africa increasingly faces similar pressures. The USA faces the additional problem of having to justify its support for racist South Africa to the substantial black community back home.

The combined effect of concern over South Africa's internal instability and concern at popular hostility to apartheid abroad has pushed the Western powers into calling for reforms in the apartheid system. Western politicians and businessmen are prepared to put diplomatic or even economic pressure on the Pretoria government. Their spokesmen call for the introduction of the reforms they consider necessary to overcome the difficulties that threaten Western interests in South Africa.

The aim of the Western governments is to stabilise South Africa for capitalist exploitation. They do not want in any way to weaken the system and pave the way for the liberation of the black masses. They have no intention of killing the goose that lays golden eggs in such abundance. All their energies are devoted to ensuring its survival and restoring its vitality.

The problem facing these Western reformers is that there is little scope for reform in South Africa when such fundamental issues are at stake. The very survival of South African capitalism is threatened by the revolt of the black working class. The scale of the recession in South Africa gives little leeway for economic concessions. The dependence of the whole structure of South African society on apartheid means that there is little room to manoeuvre in modifying the system of homelands and influx controls. In the debating chambers and party conferences of the West politicians can strike anti-apartheid postures and call for all sorts of sanctions against South Africa and all manner of reforms in apartheid. This may appease their guilty consciences but it will have no practical effect in South Africa.

The government in Pretoria and the real decision-makers in London and Washington understand that, notwithstanding all the rhetoric of the United Nations and other worthy bodies, capitalism in South Africa is inseparable from the oppression of the black

masses. For them the debate over reforms is no more than a discussion of what minor modifications in the system of oppression can be introduced to get rid of some of the more irrational features of apartheid. They also aim to induce some representatives of the black community to negotiate over the introduction of some new constitutional structure. This would not change power relations in South Africa but might help to contain the class struggle in both industry and in the townships.

The debate over sanctions is thus in practice reduced to a debate about modifying the terms on which Western capitalists screw their profits out of the South African working class. All the Western governments and big businessmen are committed to maintaining capitalism in South Africa. But capitalism in South Africa would never have taken off without apartheid and it cannot continue to exist without the continuing oppression and exploitation of the black working class.

It is not surprising to find that all the Western politicians and businessmen who are full of advice for Botha on reforms are fully supportive of his state of emergency. Western reformers will always accept that the restoration of law and order is the precondition for progress. In South Africa this means that the ruthless suppression of the resistance of black workers and students must take place before Botha's negotiations about reforms can begin. Talks in such circumstances could only ratify further humiliations for the black masses.

Western governments and big companies can never be a force for progress in South Africa. Their aim is not to get rid of exploitation and oppression but to make it safe for them. Their aim in pressing reforms on Botha is to replace a provocative and unstable form of capitalist rule with a slightly less objectionable system. In fact the harsh realities of life in South Africa mean that there is little scope for modifying apartheid. The result is that the Western powers will end up promising progress at some stage in the future and suggesting that in the meantime everybody will have to make do with minor changes in the system that exists.

The danger of the sanctions debate is that it drags genuine opponents of apartheid into the discussion of the best strategy for ensuring the survival of South African capitalism. Instead of considering how anti-apartheid campaigners can take direct action againt Western governments and firms backing South Africa, the sanctions debate channels them into talking about how they can make Western governments and firms fight apartheid.

But these forces are part of the problem not part of the solution.

For anybody who really wants to fight the apartheid regime, supporting the campaign for sanctions just does not make sense. How can an imperialist state like Britain or the USA be expected to play an anti-imperialist role? We have seen how ineffective past sanctions against South Africa have been in practice. Similar campaigns over other international issues — the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, Rhodesia after 1965 — have been equally ineffective. Imperialist powers do not destabilise their allies or their stooges. They only bring down regimes such as that of Allende in Chile which threaten Western interests.

For 25 years anti-apartheid activists have been campaigning for Western sanctions against South Africa. They have consistently demonstrated the ineffectiveness of sanctions in practice and provided valuable evidence of systematic sanctions busting by Western governments. But these campaigners never seem to ask themselves the question — why have Western sanctions against South Africa always failed? So they simply carry on demanding sanctions, ignoring the well documented facts that they always prove ineffective.

Working class traditions

The campaign for sanctions is not only irrational and doomed to be ineffective. It also represents an abandonment of the responsibility of the labour movement and the left to offer genuine working class solidarity to blacks fighting apartheid in South Africa. A parallel from the more familiar sphere of trade union struggle may clarify this point.

A group of workers come out on strike against a particularly reactionary employer. They are faced with a long and bitter dispute involving violent picket-line confrontations between strikers and scabs backed by the police and the state authorities. How would other workers respond? Would they go along to other employers, perhaps more liberal than the one at the centre of the dispute, and appeal to them to take action against their more abrasive colleague? Or would they approach workers in other industries and services, and appeal to them to take action to hit the boss in dispute as well as his colleagues in other firms and in the state apparatus?

In trade union conflicts the traditions of the British working class mean that workers invariably look to other workers rather than to the bosses for support. Yet when it comes to international issues, the labour movement puts its faith in ruling class diplomacy, rather than in independent working class action.

Given the links between the British establishment and apartheid, the only solidarity action that is likely to have any positive effect in South Africa is working class action against the British capitalist class. There is in fact a long tradition of this sort of independent anti-imperialist activity in the British labour movement.

In the 1860s Lancashire textile workers supported the struggle against slavery in the American civil war. Their courageous stand against the cotton millowners, who supported the southern slave plantation owners, cost the British workers great hardship. In 1913 British railworkers and dockers took strike action to undermine the British government's attempts to crush the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in the Dublin lockout. In 1920 London dockers refused to load the *Jolly George*, a ship carrying arms and other supplies to assist the right-wing armies trying to defeat the revolutionary government in the Soviet Union. In those days working class solidarity with workers abroad meant working class action against the bosses and the state at home.

Unfortunately, the anti-imperialist traditions of the British labour movement have been deeply buried over the past 60 years. The current campaign over South Africa shows that the anti-apartheid movement and most of the British left have adopted a quite different strategy. The objective of current solidarity activity is not to organise working class action against the state. Its aim is to mobilise public opinion to put pressure on the state to take action against the South African government. This drastic change of direction is damaging to the interests of workers in South Africa and Britain. It is alien to the Marxist tradition.

In his writing on national liberation struggles, Lenin, the Russian Bolshevik leader, always emphasised the independent role of the working class in the imperialist oppressor countries. In a famous polemic against chauvinist trends in the Western labour movements at the time of the First World War, Lenin pointed out the responsibilities of 'the proletariat, or its class conscious section, in the oppressor nation'. Workers should take action '*against* the bourgeoisie of that nation and all the elements that follow it' (*A caricature of Marxism and imperialist economism*,

1916, Collected Works, Vol 23).

In his later writings on the colonial question Lenin emphasised the need for united action between the working class movements in the West and the backward capitalist countries.

'This union alone will guarantee victory over capitalism without which the abolition of national oppression and inequality is impossible.' (*Draft theses on national and colonial questions*, 1920, Collected Works, Vol 31)

Lenin urged the newly formed communist parties to show workers the need for joint anti-imperialist action. He called on them to reject international establishment bodies such as the League of Nations (forerunner of the United Nations) which promised to achieve democracy and peace through progressive diplomacy.

In the thirties the movement around Leon Trotsky continued the Leninist approach after the degeneration of the international communist movement under the influence of Stalinism. In his *Open letter to a British comrade* in 1936 Trotsky issued a scathing condemnation of the socialist and communist parties and others in Italy. They had issued a joint appeal to the League of Nations to widen sanctions against the Italian government in response to Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia. He accused them of trying 'tc instil into the Italian people the notion that imperialist sanctions are a "means to peace" ' *(Writings of Leon Trotsky*, 1935-36). Trotsky regarded this faith in sanctions as a serious political error and condemned those who had made it as 'traitors to proletarian internationalism'.

The strength of radical support for imperialist sanctions against South Africa today reflects the political weakness of the working class movements in the West. It reveals the extent to which the Marxist approach to international solidarity has become subordinated to the diplomatic posturing of the Western imperialist powers.

In 1979 the underground black South African Congress of Trade Unions criticised the EEC code of conduct for firms operating in South Africa. It identified the aims behind the policy of 'constructive engagement' in terms which could equally be applied to proposed Western diplomatic and economic sanctions against South Africa:

'1. To put pressure on the white minority regime in South Africa to grant limited reforms to the oppressed people in order to stem the tide of revolution which is sweeping through southern Africa, and thereby to preserve South Africa as a haven for capitalist investment;

2. To diffuse anti-apartheid pressure from African countries and to protect growing European investment.

3. By posing as the genuine friends of liberation in South Africa to confuse and undermine the anti-apartheid struggle in Europe.'

This final warning to anti-apartheid activists in Europe was timely. The support of the anti-apartheid movement, the labour movement and the left for the imposition of sanctions by Western powers has indeed confused and undermined the anti-apartheid struggle. The campaign for sanctions hands over the leadership of anti-imperialist solidarity activity to the imperialist state. The flaw in this approach is not only that the British government will fail to carry out this progressive mission. The danger is that the sanctions campaign will give the anti-apartheid rhetoric of British politicians some credibility in the eyes of workers both in Africa and in the West.

The only objective of any further interference by Western politicians in South Africa would be to reconcile the masses to the continuation of imperialist domination, perhaps in a modified form. The left's uncritical support for British interference in Zimbabwe helped to ensure the transition to a pro-Western regime at the expense of the black masses who are still paying the price.

Action against apartheid

In July 1985 Southampton dockers refused to load a computer controlled milling machine destined for military use in South Africa. Earlier in 1985 dockers in San Francisco blacked a ship destined for South Africa. If this sort of direct action was taken on a wider scale against the British backers of apartheid it could make a powerful contribution to the struggle for black liberation in South Africa.

The scale of British capitalist involvement in South Africa creates tremendous scope for workers to take action in Britain against British complicity in bolstering up the apartheid regime in South Africa. A number of basic steps need to be taken.

● Pool information

Workers in different industries need to circulate information about what products are going to South Africa, focusing in particular on military supplies. Workers involved in manufacturing or transporting such goods are in the best postion to monitor what is really going on and to keep a close check on the British contribution to the international terrorist network that keeps the apartheid regime well supplied.

● Expose the terrorists

Disclosure of British links with apartheid would expose the complicity of the British state in propping up South Africa. It would reveal the hypocrisy behind British criticisms of the excesses of a regime that was originally installed by the British and has been loyally supported by the British establishment at every stage in its brutal oppression of the black majority. This would discredit the British ruling class and weaken its pernicious influence on any negotiations between the regime and representatives of the black masses that might take place.

● Take direct action

Workers can black particular products along the lines of the action taken by the Southampton dockers. Workers in different unions can take different forms of action. Workers involved in the manufacture of products for export to South Africa can take steps to disrupt production. Transport unions are in a position to block supplies to South Africa at any stage in transit. Workers in the post and telecommunications sector can interrupt services to South Africa. Workers in companies with subsidiaries in South Africa can take sympathetic industrial action in solidarity with black workers. Any action that hits the British firms that play such a crucial role in sustaining apartheid would be a useful contribution to undermining the South African state and giving the black revolt a better prospect of success.

Workers' collective action against apartheid would be a much more effective sanction against the regime than individual gestures such as withdrawing accounts from Barclays Bank. After campaigning for more than 10 years to boycott Barclays, anti-apartheid campaigners claimed a victory in August 1985 when the bank announced it was cutting back its stake in South Africa. In fact Barclays action was more a move to comply with a new South African regulation to limit overseas holdings in its banks than a response to a few hundred withdrawn personal accounts. It also

reflected the pattern of much disinvestment over the past year. Capital investment in South Africa has been declining over the past year because of falling profits — not because of diplomatic pressure.

Workers must not allow their direct action against apartheid to be diverted into diplomatic channels by trade union leaders. The right-wing leaders of the engineering union are putting a resolution to next month's TUC congress calling on unions to take action to support United Nations sanctions. Jim Slater of the seamen's union is hosting an international union conference in October which calls on unions to 'put teeth' into the United Nations resolution to isolate the apartheid regime.

This approach turns the unions into an appendage of ruling class diplomacy. It is not surprising that the UN is paying out $10 000 to sponsor the conference. It subordinates workers' action to the posturing of the Western powers as they manoeuvre to reconcile mass popular hostility against Botha's regime with their own stake in apartheid.

Workers should not waste their energy in the futile quest to make the West's phoney sanctions bite. Our aim should be to sink our teeth into the staunch allies of apartheid at home. It is high time that workers in Britain followed the example of workers in South Africa and started to take their own initiatives, instead of relying on the state to fight for workers' rights.

Direct action by British workers against British firms and the British government is the sort of solidarity action that could really count in South Africa. It would allow British workers to take their place alongside the black workers in South Africa in the struggle for black liberation from apartheid tyranny and imperialist domination.



Support the struggle against apartheid!

Become an RCP supporter!

The Revolutionary Communist Party is mobilising anti-imperialist direct action in solidarity with the black people of South Africa. You can support the fight for black liberation by supporting the activities of the RCP.

- If you work for a firm which has links with South Africa, let us know so that we can coordinate sympathetic industrial action against apartheid.
- If your union is doing anything about South Africa tell us, and we can link up activists within the same union and across the unions.
- If you want to get involved in direct action in solidarity with the struggle in South Africa, join our regular pickets, protests and contingent on demonstrations.

The RCP has branches in every major city in Britain, with regular meetings of supporters, as well as public meetings and activities. If you really want to fight apartheid, come along!

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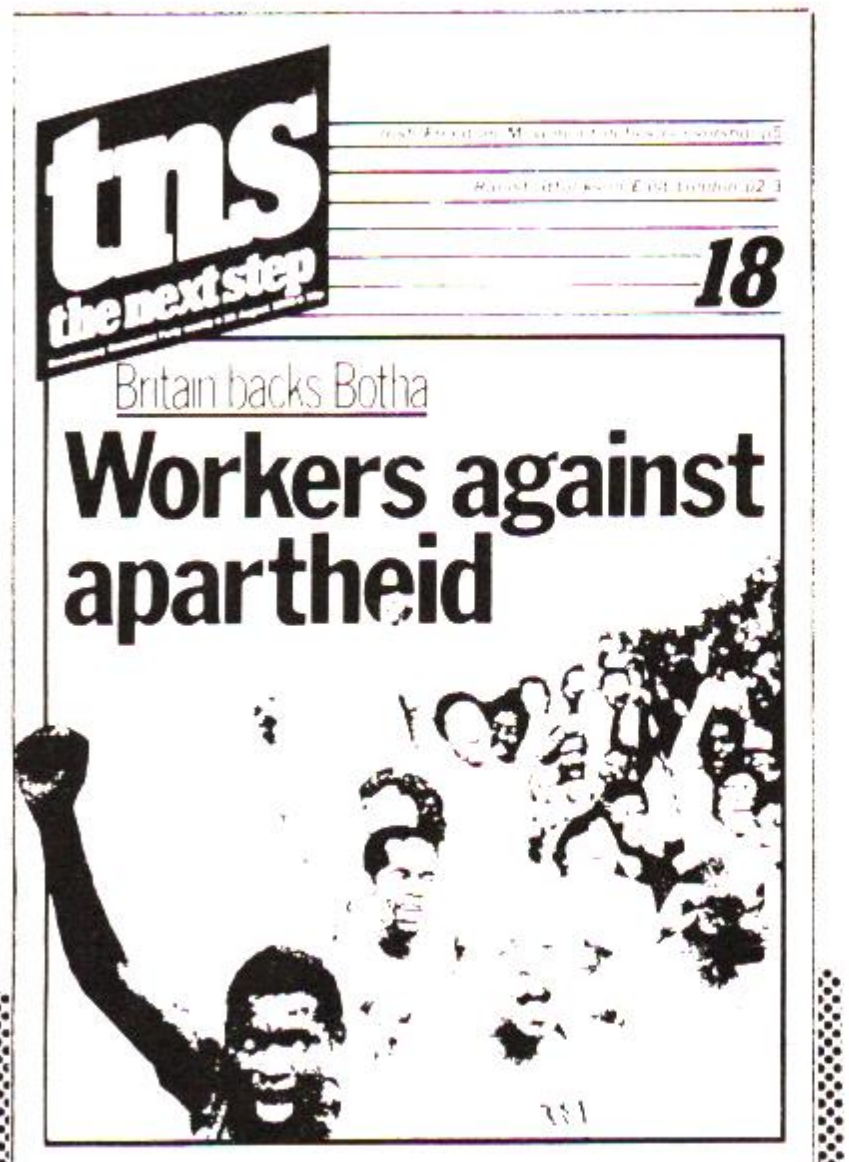
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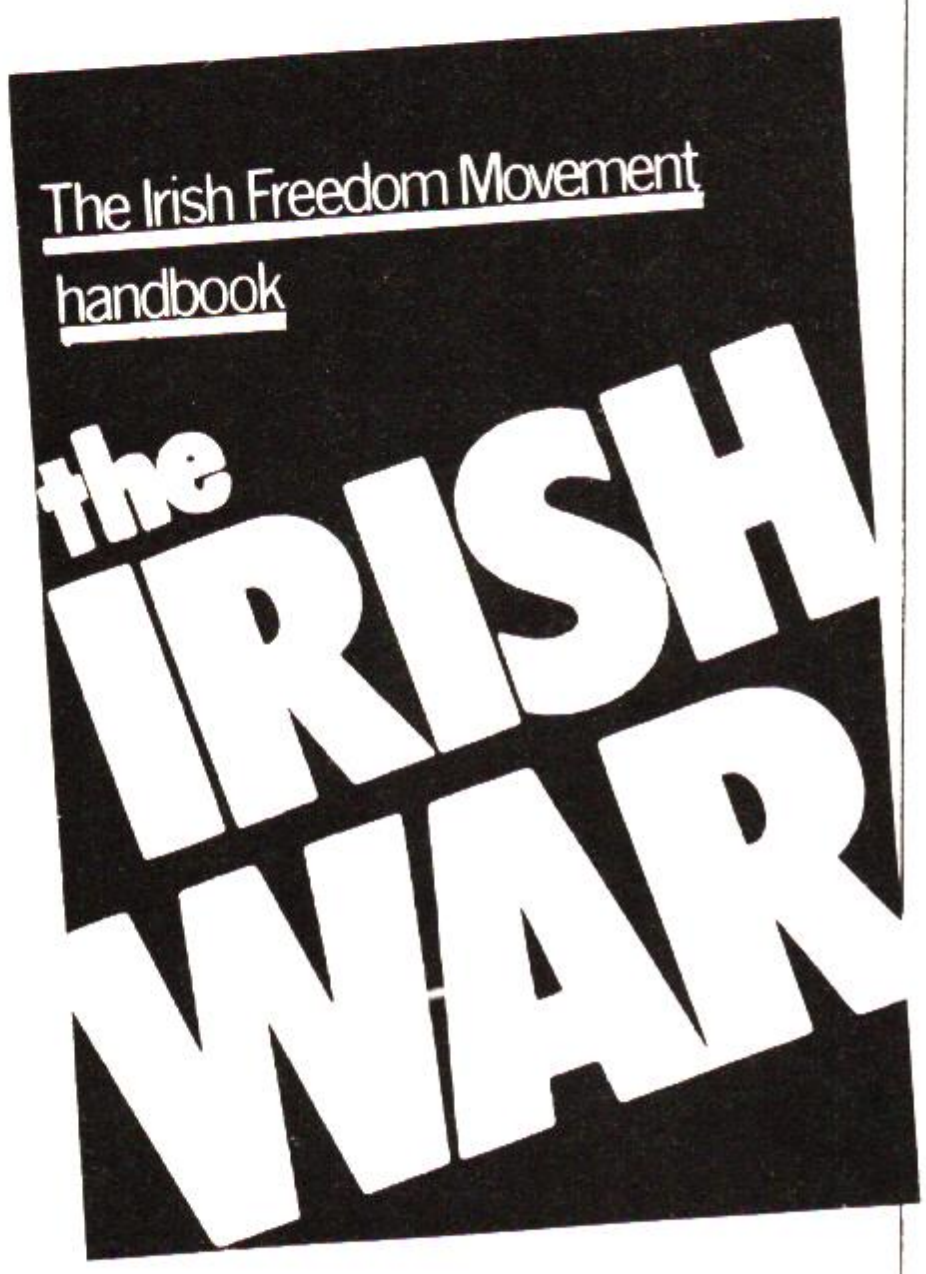
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